Dualities: The Female Performer and the Popular Stage in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris

by

Catherine Pedley

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School of Theatre Studies

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Illustrations

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandfathers who taught me that everything is possible, and thus made this possible.

Declaration

At the time of submission, none of the material contained in this thesis has been published elsewhere.

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the relationship between female performers, mass culture and the avant-garde in *fin-de-siècle* Paris. The work of the dancers, Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller, has received critical attention as the representation of either the popular stage or of early modernist experimentation, but not as an example of the site where these two artificially constructed classifications coalesced. This study seeks to fill that gap by offering a framework through which the experimental performance of these mass-cultural, female celebrities can be renegotiated in its immediate historical context. The argument is framed within the inherent dualism of the ideology and social constructions that shaped the *fin de siècle.* These binaries are considered alongside the cultural transformations that were demanded by the rapidly developing commodity culture of the period; a process that reveals the progressive destabilisation of these values and ideas as the new century approached. Chapter one engages with the theoretical concepts of the gaze that have framed approaches to voyeurism and objectification during the period. Chapter two discusses the problematic relationship between feminism and corporeality, a theme that is extended in chapter three with an investigation of responses to the new social role of the female celebrity. Chapter four focuses on the dancer Jane Avril and reveals the manner in which her performance subverted the contemporary associations between femininity, insanity and eroticism. Chapter five concludes this thesis with an exploration of the centrality of the work of Loïe Fuller to autonomous female performance and the avant-garde.

Foreword

> To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformations of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. [1]

Fin-de-siècle Paris was a carefully constructed urban environment; the social and political aims of nineteenth-century France's many successive governments and monarchies could be decoded from the physical layout of the city. The last decades of the century witnessed the attempt of the Third Republic to promote Paris as a burgeoning modern metropolis that had wholly overcome its recent turbulent political and social problems. The previous century of France's history had involved numerous military campaigns abroad and domestic conflicts and revolutions. This succession of events had cemented an image of the country - and by extension the national identity of its people - as inherently revolutionary, unpredictable and slightly dangerous in the European consciousness. These were ideas that were entirely at odds with the dominant modern thought systems that relied on the objectivity of science and rationality.

The government of the Third Republic recognised that France's economic and political future success depended upon this myth being dispelled and it deliberately put in place a series of measures to project an image of Paris as an elegant, cosmopolitan and thoroughly modern European capital city. It achieved this through the creation of another set of myths, presenting Paris as a metropolitan environment that was preoccupied with putting itself on display: the centre of spectacle, romance

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[1]Marshall Bermann, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 15.

and superficial beauty. As Vanessa Schwartz has noted, the adoption and widespread use of the term '*Paris nouveau*' during the late nineteenth century encapsulated this spirit of energetic change, a transformation that extended far beyond architectural activity, encompassing technology, entertainment and mass culture. [2] '*Paris nouveau*' was a conscious reworking of the traditional romantic vision of '*vieux Paris*'; the city's medieval streets and buildings and their association with the divide between the aristocratic and peasant populations, replacing it with the sweeping boulevards and crowds of nineteenth-century commodity culture. This deliberate transfiguration of the idea of the French capital was so successful that its inheritance resides in twenty-first century culture, where images of Paris revolve around the sentiment of both nostalgic romanticism and idealistic bohemianism propagated by this late nineteenth-century focus on spectacle and beauty. Marketing the city as a thoroughly modern space was also intended to improve the reputation of the French population as a whole: it changed their image from potential revolutionaries to cosmopolitan members of the western world.

The Eiffel Tower remains one of the city's most familiar vistas and it provides Paris's most famous extant statement of itself as a modern nineteenth-century city. The landmark has become the iconic representation of Paris, for unlike many of the metropolis's other structures it is impossible to confuse it with buildings or monuments elsewhere. Constructed in 1889 as the visual centrepiece of the *exposition universelle,* the Eiffel Tower was geographically and ideologically

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[2]Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California, 1999), p. 1.

located as a powerful symbol of the event. 1889 was a particularly important year for the French government of the Third Republic: the exhibition marked the centenary of the 1789 revolution and provided a practical and symbolic opportunity to solidify France's new identity and prove how modern the new republic was. During the period of the exhibition the tower was not only viewed officially by the 32 million visitors who patronised the event and climbed the structure, but also unofficially by anyone who had visual access to the city's skyline. The tower remained the tallest building in the world for the next fifty years: a gargantuan example of Paris's mastery and embrace of technology and progress. What is also significant, however, is the debate that surrounded the building and the divisions that it provoked across the city's artistic communities.

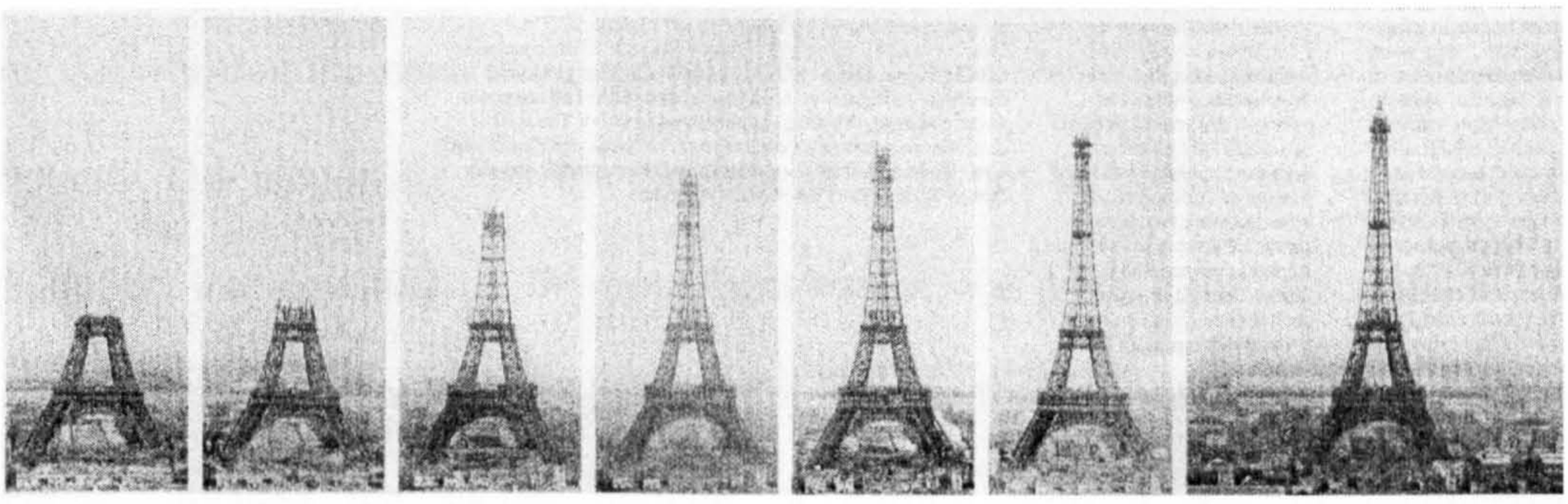

Figure one: The Construction of the Eiffel Tower.

The impact that the construction of the Eiffel Tower had on the cityscape of Paris is revealed in figure one, a series of photographs taken by the artist Henri Rivière and published in a collection entitled, *Les trente-six vues de la tour Eiffel*. Rivière's enthusiasm for the monument was unusual, however, amongst the artistic community. As a progressive artist working amongst the community at the avant-

garde cabaret, *le chat noir*, he saw the potential of working in new forms and offering new sights to different audiences. In contrast to this, the majority of Paris's literary and artistic elite rejected the structure, condemning it as an aesthetic disaster. This resistance to the plans culminated in 1887, when a group of writers and artists, including the writer Guy de Maupassant and the playwright Sardou, published a petition in the daily newspaper *Le Figaro*, stating:

> We – writers, painters, sculptors, empassioned lovers of Paris's beauty, which up until now has remained unsullied – we have come to protest, with all our might, with all our indignation, in the name of French good taste, in the name of art, in the name of history, against the construction in the heart of our beloved capital of this useless and monstrous Eiffel Tower [...] the foul shadow of this bolt-encrusted pile of sheet metal. [3]

The location of the Eiffel Tower at the centre of the network of discourses that surrounded art and tradition, 'High' and 'Low' culture, technology and creativity and the world of the mass audience reflects the *fin-de-siècle* dualities that frame this project. The judgement that the monument could not be considered as a piece of public art was justified by the complaint that it was both ugly and useless. As Debora Silverman has noted: '[t]he Eiffel Tower, the new master of the Parisian skyline, invaded the sacred domain of culture with a feat of engineering construction, divested of all functional utility.' [4] The tower provides a key example of the way in which the developing metropolitan landscape could be read as a map of power and control, while the responses to it and its immediate location in an

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[3]Cited in Caroline Mathieu, 'Exposition Universelle 1889', in *Paris in the Late Nineteenth Century,* ed. by Marc Bascou, Ted Gott et al (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1996), p. 62. The '*Pétition des artistes*' appeared in the daily paper, *Le Temps*, on February 14 1889 and was signed by figures including Messonier, Gérôme, Maupassant, Sardou and Garnier.

[4]Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California, 1989), p. 3.

environment of mass culture – the exhibition site - suggest how these visual symbols were absorbed, questioned and rejected by contemporary society.

This differentiation between 'High' and 'Low', or mass, culture is a characteristic feature of the era of modernity. In the opening citation from *All That is Solid Melts into Air,* Marshall Bermann identifies a set of emotional and sociological conditions that are evinced by the central duality of the modern experience. Bermann's understanding of the energising, yet terrifying, power that was contained within the modern period supplies a model for the interpretation of the cultural climate of late nineteenth-century Paris. The excitement and the power that were offered by the technological developments and the rapid growth of the urban environment during the modern period were tempered by the anxieties that were evoked by a new generation, fostered by the fast developing commodity culture and a simultaneous decline in shared religious and social beliefs. The presence and social awareness of an omnipresent set of diametrically opposed binaries suggested by the Eiffel Tower is visible throughout the *fin-de-siècle* city of Paris and its popular culture.

An investigation of these dualities reveals a central division between Masculine and Feminine, indicated by the phallic nature of the engineering feat of the Eiffel Tower rising above the exhibition site. From this emerge a further set of oppositions that had a direct effect on the world of popular entertainment. These take the form of 'High' Culture / 'Low' Culture; Voyeur / Object; Active / Passive; Rational / Irrational and Spiritual / Embodied and offer a means of understanding the historical

moment of *fin-de-siècle* mass culture and a way of renegotiating the meaning of the popular stage to the female performer.

Introduction: Reconstructing the *fin-de-siècle* popular stage

The relationship between the spectacle offered by the late nineteenth-century popular stage and the experimental work of the female performer forms the central focus of this thesis. An analysis of the work of the dancers Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller allows access to the discursive network engendered by the intersection of mass culture and the avant-garde at the *fin de siècle.* Focusing on the burgeoning metropolitan entertainment industry in Paris, it explores the power of contemporary constructions of femininity and questions the extent to which popular female performers challenged and appropriated social ideas surrounding gender in their search to find an experimental performance space within the urban environment of modernity.

The predominant cultural ideas of late nineteenth-century Paris revolved around the set of binary oppositions delineated in the foreword. Of particular relevance to the *fin-de-siècle* popular stage is the inherent dualism that shaped approaches to culture and to gender during the period. The division between 'High' and 'Low' culture has had a direct effect on the serious consideration of mass entertainment. As Andreas Huyssen has commented, one of the main ways that 'High' modernism has been classified and understood is through a self-conscious distinction of itself from mass culture. [1] The result of this has been the dismissal of the popular stage celebrity from investigations of performance history.

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[1]Gunster, Shane, 'Revisiting the Culture Industry Thesis: Mass Culture and the Commodity Form', in *Cultural Critique* 45 (Spring 2000), 40-70, p. 43.

In the case of the female celebrity this exclusion has been exacerbated by the tensions that are evoked by the dualistic understanding of gender that shaped the period. The philosophy of separate spheres, a discursive field that dominated contemporary social concepts of masculinity and femininity, divided everyday life into public and private spaces and dictated that the domestic was the morally correct environment for Woman. The extent to which these ideas pervaded society in the 1860s is made clear in an account by the social commentator Jules Michelet, where he noted that there were:

> many irritations for the single woman! She can hardly ever go out in the evening; she would be taken for a prostitute. [...] For example, should she find herself delayed at the other end of Paris and hungry, she will not dare to enter into a restaurant. She would constitute an event; she would be a spectacle. All eyes would be constantly fixed on her, and she would overhear uncomplimentary and bold conjectures. [2]

This distinction between the public and the private spheres was the result of pre-existing ideas about the defining oppositional characteristics of men and women, but it also acted as a major contributing factor to a series of reactionary binaries that shaped the city of the late nineteenth-century. The gently mocking tone of Michelet's response to these ideas indicates that, as early as the 1860s, the ideology behind the philosophy of separate spheres was not unquestioned. Certainly by the end of the century the assumptions that they were founded on were being challenged.

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[2]Jules Michelet, cited in Griselda Pollock, 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity', in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 244-67 (p. 254).

The presence of an ideal social model presupposes its nemesis, in terms of an anti-culture or a series of sub-cultures that resist and threaten its stabilising values. This is especially true when the concepts that a social ideological force is trying to define and thus control are infinitely diverse, such as those concerning gender and aesthetics. In the transitory conceptual spaces that exist between the ideal and the anti culture at a particular historical moment it is possible to trace moments of agency. This concept suggests something amorphous; a level of transgression and resistance that is effective as a result of its ability to slip, concealed, between the cultural and social boundaries that have been established in a particular time. This is an idea that can be extended through an investigation of the popular stage, an urban site that held a somewhat ambiguous position in contemporary society: located between the acceptable and the unacceptable.

To what extent can the venue define the nature of the form?

Studies of *fin-de-siècle* avant-garde movements have tended to focus on the small, generally exclusive, stages of the societies, theatres and cabarets that produced the series of movements that are acknowledged to be one of the important roots of European modernism. A significant proportion of these movements were based in Paris, from the work of the early Impressionists and the Society of Independent Artists, to the synthetic experiments of the Symbolists and the public 'happenings' of the Surrealist movement. What is striking about the numerous performers, writers and artists who were involved in the histories of these environments is that they were

nearly all male. This raises the problematic question of whether women were active participants in these communities whose contribution has not been recorded, or present solely as marginal figures: models, muses or prostitutes (as contemporary reports and paintings suggest). What is clear is that the exclusive, bohemian nature of these spaces, and their dominance of ideas surrounding early modernist performance, has resulted in the preclusion of the female performer from this area of theatre history.

The type of entertainment that filled the mainstream large playhouses and the stages of mass culture reveals an affiliation between the aims, size and financial viability of entertainment and the manner in which it was judged culturally: the fundamental roots of the binary between 'High' and 'Low' culture. The aesthetic ideals of individualism and solitude that are commonly recognised as the roots of artistic, literary and theatrical modernism are entirely inconsistent with the huge audiences and mass advertising that characterised the popular culture of the city. Instead intimate, and often exclusive, venues supply examples of the development of experimental ideas during the period.

Reinterpretations of the early period of modernity have questioned how it has been defined. In 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity', a discussion of the absence of female artists from the figures who have been canonised as the originators of modern art, Griselda Pollock has suggested that critical approaches to and understandings of the period need to be renegotiated. She concludes that theoretical

and historical understandings of modernity are the result of later academic intervention: 'what modernist art history celebrates is a selective tradition which normalizes, as the *only* modernism, a particular and gendered set of practices'. [3] Although Pollock's subject in this article is the impressionist community, her argument is applicable across the breadth of the disciplines and the initial process of the deconstruction of the 'masculine myths of modernism' she insists upon is essential to an understanding of female creativity during the 1890s. [4] Where male artists, writers and performers discovered a metropolitan environment that offered room for experimentation, their female counterparts did not have the same level of access to these intimate performance spaces and the sense of community that they often involved. This exclusion resulted in female performers adopting the arena of mass culture, in order to gain both a performance space and an audience.

Shifting attention to the venues of the popular stage has historically resulted in the automatic dismissal of the work from an exploration in terms of valuable – or resistive - artistic performance: an extension of the 'High'/'Low' culture binary revealed in the nineteenth-century rejection of mass culture as aesthetically valid. Nineteenth-century mass cultural spaces have frequently been used as a way to access information surrounding social ideas (for example to glean information surrounding the prostitution that was rife at both the Empire and the Alhambra in London or the *Folies-Bergère* in Paris), or as models to supply demographic information about contemporary audiences. Recent scholarship has questioned these

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[3]Pollock, p. 244.
[4]Pollock, p. 244.

assumptions with relation to the popular Victorian stage, most extensively in the renegotiation of melodrama, but the work of individual performers remains notably absent from this developing recognition of the importance of mass entertainment. The theatre historian Simon Featherstone, however, has turned to the area of Victorian music hall as a site of resistance and located the work of the English music hall stars, including Marie Lloyd and Vesta Tilley, as central to the disruption of constructs of gender and femininity during the period. [5]

What has become clear through this developing academic interest in mass culture is that the music-hall and dance-hall stages of the late nineteenth century were considered to be independent of legitimate theatre: semi-authorised – or at least tolerated – transgressive spaces, on the margins of moral culture. The position of these venues as public spaces, rather than the relatively private artistic cabarets, with their characteristically intimate masculine atmosphere, is vital. Not only were the spaces of mass culture public, but also the pricing structures meant that they were accessible to a cross-section of society: the resulting audiences were composed of a mixture of classes, genders and nationalities and often included members of the avant-garde circle.

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[5]Simon Featherstone, 'Vestal Flirtations: the Performance of the Feminine in late Nineteenth-Century Music Hall', unpublished conference paper given at 'The 1890s: an Interdisciplinary Conference' (University of Newcastle, July 2001).

The modern city: interpreting the 'Geography of Pleasure'

The pursuit of the pleasures that were offered by the modern city - and the resulting level of conspicuous consumption that the public spaces of the developing metropolis encouraged - is central to an understanding of the experience of modernity. The worlds of commerce and of entertainment were integrally linked by their reliance on the technological developments of the period and their economic dependence on the same audience. Paris's entertainment industry peaked at the *fin de siècle*. In the 1880s and 1890s more than a half a million Parisians went to the theatre once a week and more than a million went once a month. [6] These figures, however, only provide evidence of the recorded box office sales for the main theatres. The mainstream stage, with its standard offering of well-made plays and light operettas, may have provided for the middle classes, but it did not reflect the economic and cultural diversity of the city's audiences. As John Henderson has stated in his study of the birth of the late nineteenth-century avant-garde in Paris:

> The theatre in the nineteenth century was a reflection of the society in which it flourished. The age of economic expansion which followed the Industrial Revolution favoured the growth of a mercantile middle class, and this class demanded for its entertainment a theatre in which it saw an idealized picture of its own qualities, a theatre that was moral, comfortable and thoroughly predictable. [7]

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[6]Eugen Weber, *France Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Belknap, 1986), p. 159.
It is important to place these figures in context: by 1896 the population of Paris numbered 2,536, 834. Source: Adna Ferrin Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Centruy: A Study in Cities* (Ithaca; New York: Cornell University, 1968), p. 73.
[7]John Henderson, *The First Avant-Garde, 1887-1894: Sources of the Modern French Theatre* (London: Harrap, 1971), p. 22.

In addition to this, the entertainment industry in the city catered for a cross-spectrum of spectators, in terms of class, nationality and gender, a fact that is reflected in the diversity of venues and entertainment styles that filled the city. Alongside the predictable programme offered by these theatres were the more spontaneous entertainment forms that filled the city's venues of mass culture. The mélange of acts that filled the hugely popular circuses and dance-halls included acrobats, horse-back riders, dancers, singers, sketches, musicians and comedians in venues that ranged from outdoor café-concerts, to the circus ring of the Hippodrome, as well as the variety stages of dance-halls like the *Moulin Rouge* and the *Folies-Bergère*.

Any examination of the popular stage automatically raises problematic questions surrounding gender. The *fin-de-siècle* female celebrity engages with two difficult areas: firstly, the ways in which women who actively chose to occupy the public sphere were both represented and judged in the nineteenth century, and secondly, the way that popular performers, who at least partially depended upon the female body for their act, have been treated by later feminist critics. The language, ideas and anxieties that dominate and shape these two difficult areas are surprising in their similarities. Responding to the philosophy of separate spheres, Griselda Pollock has noted that, in the modern city, '[w]omen could enter and represent selected locations in the public sphere – those of entertainment and display. But a line demarcates not the end of the public/private divide but the frontier of the spaces of femininity'. [8] This idea that a woman ceased to fulfil her moral and social role when she stepped on the stage, or into the public arena, pervaded ideas in the late nineteenth-century

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[8]Pollock, p. 259.

city. In the developing commodity culture of the modern metropolis, however, this binary was simply not practicable and thus not convincingly sustained in images and performances from the period.

Similarly, the sense of discomfort that has shaped feminist approaches to female embodiment has resulted in an exclusion, or subordination, of the body that evokes similar sentiments in terms of the meaning of being a woman. It is these hazy areas between the overly simplistic, and thus unsustainable, dualities that have been created in an attempt to understand and contain society, gender and culture that this project focuses upon. The ideological and physical liminal spaces of transgression offered by the modern metropolitan environment offered a degree of liberation and empowerment, a moment of potential agency. They were also the cause of much anxiety, as chapter two's exploration of mythical representations of femininity reveals.

The reconstruction and interpretation of historical sites of popular culture requires an interdisciplinary approach. It is essential to take into account the dynamic interaction of the historical and social ideas that shaped the late nineteenth-century metropolis, both in the seemingly superficial environments of fashion and entertainment and in the more complex questions that are evoked by matters of urban legislation, tourism and colonialism. The female popular performer was very much a product of her time and as such her work was influenced by and responded to these immediate socio-historical conditions. Theories adopted from a broad

spectrum of disciplines, including theatre historiography; cultural studies; art history and film studies, shape this attempt to unravel the ideas and the forces that supplied and shaped the new mass audience and directly and indirectly determined the style of entertainment that they demanded.

The focus on dance that is necessitated by the work of Avril and Fuller makes the argument for a positive dialectic between female performance and the popular stage more problematic. The *fin-de-siècle* symbolist poet, travel writer, essayist and theatre critic, Arthur Symons, famously defined attitudes towards the controlled rhythmic movement of the female body in an 1898 article entitled, 'The World as Ballet', where he identified the appeal of the form as, 'the intellectual as well as the sensual appeal of a living symbol, which can but reach the brain through the eyes'. [9]

Symons spent long periods of time in Paris and was fascinated by the city's popular culture and female performers and this article is contemporaneous with the height of Avril's and Fuller's fame. Symons offers a further idea of the problematic relationship between the woman and dance that complicates the understanding of their work as experimental performance. The fundamental assumptions that Symons reveals in his statement – that dance is an unconscious and instinctive art, linked with essentialist concepts of a natural, implicit femininity, rather than a conscious level of creativity – predominated at the end of the nineteenth century and remained until the arrival of Diaghilev and the Ballet Russe in Western Europe.

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[9]Arthur Symons, 'The World as Ballet', in *Studies in Seven Arts* (London: Archibald Constance and Company, 1908), p. 391.

In spite of the problematic questions of essentiality and the focus on the female body, however, early modern dance did offer an area of performance that was relatively free from a male-dominated aesthetic framework. In general, female dancers constructed their own systems of movement within a 'non-narrative based' performance. In addition to this, the fixation with the female body, evinced in Edgar Degas's (1834-1917) countless images of ballet dancers, also reveals an interesting theme. For what Degas represents is the dancer frozen in time in his paintings: either the ballet dancer off-stage, in the wings or mending her shoes. Even selections from Symons's poetry immortalise the figure of the dancer as one whose power is a result of her practical stillness, evinced in the poem 'Javanese Dancers':

> Smiling between her painted lids a smile,
> Motionless, unintelligible, she twines
> Her fingers into mazy lines
> The scarves across her fingers twine the while
>
> One, two, three, four glide forth, and, to and fro,
> Delicately and imperceptibly
> Now swaying gently in a row
>
> Still, with fixed eyes, monotonously still,
> Mysteriously, with smiles inanimate,
> With lingering feet that undulate,
> With sinuous fingers, spectral hands that thrill. [10]

As Symons's Javanese Dancers do not convey an image of dancers actively performing, they are classified as passive and non-creative figures. In contrast to this motif of motionlessness, accounts of Avril's and Fuller's performances focus on the athleticism demanded by their respective styles. Responses to the active female

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[10]Arthur Symons, 'Javanese Dancers', in *Arthur Symons: Poetry and Prose*, ed. by R. V. Holdsworth (Cheadle: Carcanet, 1974), pp.69-70.

body of the performer, in this case the popular stage dancer, discloses an important nineteenth-century dualistic concept that is integrally related to social constructs of gender: femininity was classified by a characteristically passive state and masculinity by activity. The physicality necessitated by the work of female performers suggests that movement contained the potential for a different level of expression: a moment of agency that did not fit comfortably with contemporary ideals of femininity. This link between the spaces between ideological dualities and the active female performing body provokes some problematic, yet productive, conceptual and theoretical questions.

Chapter one locates the popular stage within the city-wide aesthetic of spectacle that dominated ways of seeing and of being seen in the late nineteenth-century metropolis, exploring the notion of the multiple gazes that were offered to the *fin-de-siècle* Parisian and the tourist. It applies these new spectatorial positions to the popular stage and commodity culture, considering the associations between the two through the modern urban sites of the department store and the universal exhibition. Chapter two engages with *fin-de-siècle* constructs of gender and their effect on representations of female embodiment, through an exploration of the manner in which a concept of femininity was constructed in a city obsessed with spectacle and the resulting tensions that characterised the struggle to maintain this ideal in the face of the reality of modern, urban life. By identifying the ideal woman and her nemesis, through the myths of femininity, and engaging with the ensuing questions

of femininity and corporeality, it establishes the roots of many of the fundamental assumptions that surround the popular stage performer.

Chapter three considers the female celebrity, both as a historically specific figure and within theoretical approaches to mass culture. It locates her as a cultural icon in late nineteenth-century Paris, who was marketed by the new technologies of modernity and compares responses to her performance with those of the small-scale artistic movements that were occurring in the metropolis.

Chapters four and five focus on the work of Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller, two of the most famous celebrities on the late nineteenth-century popular stage. An investigation of their performance styles, and the ways in which they have been recorded, echoes Pollock's idea that the relationship between women, modernity and creativity demands to be reconstructed. Jane Avril was resident at the *Moulin Rouge* as a solo dancer (although she occasionally took part in the *quadrille naturaliste* or Cancan) and Loïe Fuller was the resident star of the *Folies Bergère.* The connection between Avril and Fuller is not solely the result of the similarities in their performance form and the venues that they performed in, they were both also integral in the formation of a new figure in the modern metropolis: the female celebrity. Placed within their immediate cultural context, Avril and Fuller act as clear symbols of transgressive femininity. Avril absorbed the discourses that linked insanity and femininity and used the performance space as both a therapeutic environment that offered a temporary escape and an environment in which to

experiment with her ideas surrounding dance. Fuller applied the developing technological ideas of light and colour in her search to find the ultimately expressive performance art. The similarities and the differences that these two performers display, in terms of their style and their ideas, provide an enlightening approach to the empowerment that was offered by performing on the mass cultural music-hall stage.

Women on the *fin-de-siècle* popular stage who self-consciously transgressed contemporary ideals of femininity disrupted the simple binary of voyeurism and objectification that has dominated understandings of female corporeality, sexuality and thus performance, at the end of the nineteenth century. As Pollock has noted:

> [T]he sexual politics of looking – a politics at the heart of modernist art [...] function around a regime which divides into binary positions, activity / passivity, looking / being seen, voyeur / exhibitionist, subject / object. [11]

This complication of the dualisms that were implicit in contemporary visual culture allows a deconstruction of notions of the female performer. As Elizabeth Dempster has stated:

> [T]he body, dancing, can challenge and deconstruct cultural inscriptions [...] In moments of dancing the edges of things blur and terms such as mind / body, flesh / spirit, carnal / divine, male / female become labile and unmoored, breaking loose from the fixings of their pairings. [12]

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[11]Pollock, p. 263.

[12]Elizabeth Dempster, cited in Janet Wolff, 'Dance Criticism: Feminism, theory and choreography', in *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, ed. by Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 242.

The theoretical concepts that surround dualistic approaches to gender and performance in the nineteenth century allow, indeed demand, a renegotiation of examples of experimental performance on the stages of mass culture, establishing the work of individual popular celebrities as an integral part of early modernist theatrical innovation.

Chapter One: The Modern City and the Metropolitan Gaze(s): Complicating Voyeurism/Objectification

The topographical features inscribed upon the cityscape of Paris by France's successive governments and monarchies provided an urban backdrop that complied with the prevailing ideas of Western modernity, but it was the spectacles of quotidian existence that occurred against this developing façade that most clearly revealed the *fin-de-siècle* experience, the social meanings and effects of the modern world. The popular stage was one of a number of mass-cultural sites that adopted the aesthetic of display which characterised late nineteenth-century Paris, leading the author of *Pour Bien Voir Paris*, a French language city guide published in 1889, to claim: 'Paris is the real and permanent exposition of all France'. [1]

This concept of display was not just the central factor in the series of major urban renovations that took place in the metropolis and in the large number of new monuments that were commissioned for the city's official public art collection during the nineteenth century. [2] For it was also at the core of the spectacle that Paris's inhabitants and visitors themselves offered on a day-to-day basis, through their costume and the ways that they were seen in public. As Petra Kuppers has commented, 'cities are not just made out of glass and bricks, but live in the bodies, habits and movements of their inhabitants'. [3] Indeed the love of display soon became an accepted characteristic of the Parisian population, as well as a

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[1]Edmond Deschaumes, cited in Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris*, (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California, 1998), p. 1.

[2]In 1885, for example, John Milner notes that the government spent 43,500F on works for the City of Paris's art collection. John Milner, *The Studios of Paris: The Capital of Art in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London; New Haven: Yale University, 1988), p. 68.

[3]Petra Kuppers, 'Moving in the Cityscape: Performance and the Embodied Experience of the *Flâneur*', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 60 (1999), 308-17 (p. 308).

feature of the physical cityscape. This is illustrated in the 1900 edition of *John Bull's Trip to Paris,* where the author acknowledged that, '[t]he talent for acting comes more readily to a Frenchman than to an Englishman. Every Frenchman is more or less of a born actor'. [4] The contemporary images and vocabulary that were evoked by late nineteenth-century Paris and its citizens were integrally linked to ideas that encompassed performance and display.

The understanding that it was the spectacular nature of the French capital that formed its primary appeal, both to its citizens and to visitors, permeated the majority of the writing in contemporary tourist literature and the popular press. The city's obsession with display was marketed as the main reason for its seductive appeal, with the industry of mass culture forming an integral element of this pervasive aesthetic of spectacle. There was one fundamental prerequisite for this preoccupation with the visual; an audience. *Fin-de-siècle* Paris was a stage and its citizens fulfilled the roles of performers and spectators. This chapter aims to question the negative associations that have evolved from specific understandings of the gaze in the late nineteenth century by disrupting the simplistic opposition of voyeurism and objectification that has arisen from the assumption of a gender and class-specific gaze and its locus on the female body. The attempt to diversify these ideas and to reconstruct ways of looking draws upon two new urban environments that were offered by the modern city – the department store and the *exposition universelle* – to suggest the development of new and mixed modes of spectatorship in the metropolis that constituted an audience shared by the world of mass culture.

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[4]Anon., *John Bull's Trip to Paris* (London: Favourite Publishing, 1900), pp. 35-6.

'Flânerie': complicating the gaze

In order to investigate the nature of the city's population as an audience, ideas surrounding contemporary viewing positions need to be diversified to encompass the universality of access to the spectacles of the modern metropolis and the many gazes that were focused on them: male, female, colonized, immigrant and tourist, to name but a few. Foucault's deconstruction of systems of social control in the late nineteenth century revealed the attempts that were made to manipulate the ways that people looked at - and thus understood - the new urban environment that surrounded them. [5] The commissioning of works of public art by France's successive governments supplies a seemingly simple example of this motive, with the employment of images that used familiar iconography and mythological themes in the attempt to promote the country and develop a set of shared values. The spontaneous, public spectacle of the metropolis that occurred against the cityscape, however, complicates and questions the ultimate success of these aims. The diversity of entertainment forms on the *fin-de-siècle* popular stage supports the idea that, in the case of the modern mass audience, it is untenable to assume that there was one single gaze to monitor.

This identification of a fundamental set of differences between mass culture and authorised, state-funded, 'High' culture is not to suggest that there was no network of power relations involved in the geography of pleasure. The presence of social ideas in the arena of mass culture is undeniable and crucial to a productive exploration of gender and performance. To return to Foucauldian concepts of power, the web of authority is rarely explicit, for, '[i]f power were

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[5]Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 119-23.

never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think anyone would be brought to obey it?' [6] The popular culture industry of *fin-de-siècle* Paris formed a part of a wider network of control, but it is also possible to trace resistance to this power in the relative spontaneity of the entertainment forms on offer and in the diversity of responses to them. Beginning the process of reconfiguring the gaze emphasises the complexity that Foucault understood to be central to power relations and further questions the reductive approach to the dynamics of the popular stage that has resulted in the automatic consideration of the female performer as a sexual object.

It would be facile to suggest that the *fin-de-siècle* metropolis, with its emphasis on display, does not supply a perfect site for an investigation of the dominant male gaze, but this patriarchal, authoritative way of looking was one of a multitude of metropolitan gazes, across the numerous social fields and positions that the feminist Foucauldian critic, Biddy Martin, sees as essential to an understanding of gender, sexuality and identity:

> Sexuality and identity can only be understood, then, in terms of the complicated and often paradoxical ways in which pleasures, knowledges and power are produced and disciplined in language and institutionalised across multiple social fields. [7]

The complexity of the relationship between looking and objectification at the end of the nineteenth century can be indicated by a brief deconstruction of the 'male' gaze(s) present in the contemporary metropolis: in the simplest terms these encompassed the upper-classes; the intelligentsia; the bohemians; the new working classes, the labourers who were constructing the new city and France's

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[6]Ibid., p. 119.
[7]Biddy Martin, 'Feminism, Criticism and Foucault', in *Feminism and Foucault,* ed. by Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (Boston: Northeastern University, 1988), p. 9.

developing infrastructure; the dandies and, indeed, the newly public homosexual, plus all of the crossovers that these social and subjective positions incurred. The diversity of these spectatorial positions makes it clear that the idea of one single gaze, that adhered to a shared system of values and judgements, is untenable and needs to be multiplied to encompass many new ways of seeing, a large proportion of which had been instigated, mutated or empowered by the development of the modern city.

Understandings of and responses to the female body form the central theme of chapter two, but it is important to acknowledge the core relationship between female corporeality and the gaze at this point. The idea of the gaze as a positive force does raise its own dangers and evokes problematic arguments surrounding objectification, but it was primarily the active, visible bodies of performers on the popular stage, such as Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller, that helped to shift conceptions of femininity and to consolidate Paris's renown as a city that offered a creative space for the female artist. The feminist deconstruction of the gaze has resulted in a sense of discomfort with the connection of women and looking, and with placing the female body at the core of any retrospective approach to an understanding of an historical period. The outcome of this approach has been the subordination of the body to the less gender specific powers of the mind, and consequently, an almost automatic, negative association between women and spectacle. This is intensified when the subject in question is the area of female creativity, where it is apparent that disembodied forms of expression, such as writing and painting, have been

considered more worthy of attention by those who wish to reclaim female artists. This is clear in the relationship between women and modernity, where forms of work such as stream of consciousness writing, which affiliates the female creative process with a spiritual and intellectual state, have been celebrated. The reclamation and incorporation of the female modernists based in Paris in the early years of the twentieth century within feminist criticism, while earlier performers have been neglected or only considered within very specific disciplines (for example dance studies), provides further evidence of this sense of a systematic and implicitly hierarchical differentiation between body and mind. The consequence of this ingrained discomfort with engaging with the active, female performing body is that corporeality and objectification have remained problematic elements of any recreation of the popular stage.

Possessing the power to watch other people from freely occupied social spaces has generally been accepted as a central element in interpreting imbalances in social relations. This is particularly true of the field of gender ideology, where feminist theory has exposed how the long-held male right to gaze at women has reinforced the construction of femininity as subordinate and objectified, an approach that was encapsulated in the film critic, Laura Mulvey's, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. In this article, published in 1975, Mulvey explored the presupposed male, voyeuristic viewer of the big budget Hollywood movie and identified this masculine gaze as a mechanism of control. The concluding argument of the article stated that the popular cinema of the 1970s revolved around the Freudian concept of the 'socopophilic instinct', where the viewer automatically interprets the human site of his gaze as an erotic object. [8]

[8]Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16:3 (1975), 6-18 (p. 7).

Crucial as Mulvey's article was to the development of feminist thought, the international renown of this work as the first major essay of feminist film theory has resulted in the general infusion of the term 'gaze' with one specific meaning and project. The gaze and the object of the gaze, however, have been present through all societies since the beginning of time and have been captured and translated through diverse artistic mediums. Indeed, when Laura Mulvey returned to the subject ten years later to refine her ideas she argued against a wholly negative approach to Hollywood film and instead proposed that the relationship between women, viewers and the camera was in a state of flux that depended upon the variables of historical and political conditions. [9]

Mulvey was not the first, however, to presuppose a dominant gendered gaze as a key element in the politics of looking. The problematic presence of a single, controlling male gaze is crystallised in *fin-de-siècle* Paris by the presence of the *flâneur*, both as an important socio-historical figure and through his domination of critical approaches to the period. The iconic status of the *flâneur* is so pervasive that it is difficult to disassociate the label from the visual image of the black-clad, dandy-esque figure that was immortalised by contemporary writers such as Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe and documented in the later social commentaries of Walter Benjamin. The *flâneur* was economically and socially independent, free to wander around the modern metropolis without being noticed or disturbed: a lover of the crowd who fed off its energy, yet never actually became a member of it. This male, middle-class metaphor of Western modernity may have provided a productive position from which to approach an understanding of the period and it is important to acknowledge his influence in

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[9]Laura Mulvey, 'Changes', *Discourse* (1985), 11-30 (p. 28).

the development of *fin-de-siècle* Paris's obsession with spectacle and relentless focus on the exterior appearance of people, buildings and objects. Simultaneously, however, the specificity with which the figure has been identified has propagated a central idea of exclusivity within the modernist experience. One of the most immediately apparent exclusions that this construction implies is that of Woman, suggesting that the *fin-de-siècle* Parisian female was denied the right to participate within the spectacular environment that characterised the capital. The *flâneur* also precludes the lower classes from the modern experience of looking – an assumption that simply cannot be substantiated for, although it is true that the nature of the visual experience would have been different depending on class, the major elements of the metropolis's quotidian spectacle were open to all.

The freedom to roam the city alone and to watch the metropolitan spectacle, day or night, whilst remaining disengaged from it, has resulted in the art of the *flâneur* being considered intrinsically masculine, a notion that was reinforced by both Baudelaire's and Benjamin's repetition of male images in their writing. The Michelet quotation that was cited in the introduction to this thesis offers one set of evidence surrounding women's access to the public spaces of the city, with his conclusion that the presence of a woman in public resulted in her constituting 'an event; she would be a spectacle'.[10] Attempts to construct or retrieve a female *flâneur* have been largely unsuccessful for it is undeniably true that women were a primary object of the male gaze in nineteenth-century urban capitals: as Deborah Epstein Nord questioned, how is it possible for the spectacle to become

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[10]Jules Michelet, cited in Griselda Pollock, 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity', in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art* History, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 244-67 (p. 254).

the spectator? [11] One way of beginning to approach this question is to pay close attention to the nature of the *flâneur* at the *fin de siècle* and through a reconstruction of the figure to question his role as a member of the wider metropolitan audience.

In spite of the fact that the image of the *flâneur* remains a common motif of the *fin de siècle,* particularly in the character of the dandy that was propagated by the fiction of Huysmans and Proust, the earlier figure that populates Baudelaire's and Benjamin's work is affiliated with the Parisian arcades, retail areas that were constructed in the 1820s and 1830s. By the end of the century no individual was immune from the diverse and scrutinising metropolitan gazes that shaped the city of spectacle. Looking became part of a commodified system of exchange and the transmuted versions of the *flâneur* that appear as a result of this social and cultural shift act as important social markers. The resulting exclusion of the non-participatory gaze – the ability of the *flâneur* to watch passively – is inextricably linked to the rise of mass culture. As Rhonda Garelick notes in her study of dandyism, gender and performance at the *fin de siècle,* the new entertainment forms and urban spaces that emerged in Paris demanded new ways of looking and '[a]s a responsive audience member in a mass-cultural space, the decadent dandy exchange[d] his isolated corner for a place in the crowd'. [12] The sheer size of the spectacle of mass culture demanded an audience, an interactive and collective, rather than a removed and individual, gaze. The female performer is at the core of this transformation of spectatorship, as a popular locus for this new set of metropolitan gazes. The extent to which she self-consciously used her

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[11]Deborah Epstein Nord, 'The Urban Perpatetic: Spectator, Streetwalker, Woman Writer', *Nineteenth Century Literature,* 46:3, (1991), 351-75 (p. 360).
[12]Rhonda K. Garelick, *Rising Star: Dandyism: Gender and Performance in the Fin-de-siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1998), p. 4.

physical presence to resist and reject contemporary ideas about gender is in part due to this renegotiation of the gaze in the period.

The female performer's specific relationship with and appropriation of the metropolitan gaze(s) of the *fin de siècle* subverts Nord's problematic question of how it is possible for the spectacle to become the spectator. The celebrity necessarily needed to be a spectacle, but her position also meant that she needed to control and to manipulate the gaze(s) that were focused on her and furthermore to be aware of, and to look objectively at, the other competing mass cultural environments of the city. The initial freedoms that were offered to the performer by her position in the entertainment industry also allowed her access to many other areas of the city, for example both Avril and Fuller became frequent visitors to the city's museums and art galleries and engaged with many of Paris's smaller artistic communities. The female performer's ability to move within these public spaces of the city, combined with her integral involvement in a society where all was spectacle, makes her a productive figure to question the concept of the *flâneur.*

In *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin de Siècle Paris,* the cultural historian Vanessa Schwartz proposes a way around the theoretical hurdle of the *flâneur.* Schwartz's approach is not intended to resolve the problems concerning objectification that have been registered by feminist critics, rather she aims to offer a more accurate analysis of the gaze during the period in question. She rejects the figure of the *flâneur* and instead presents the activity of *flânerie* as a positionality of power that is not inherently gendered, but rather an integral part

of a panoramic 'society of spectacle'. [13] This removal of the image of an individual looking and its replacement with a *fin-de-siècle* activity reduces the class and gender-specific issues that tend to be associated with the era. Schwartz's approach is supported by historical accounts of the period, which make it clear that women were very much involved in the process of looking, particularly within the burgeoning world of popular culture and commerce, where certain areas of the modern city were deliberately marketed to the female gaze. The increasing socio-economic force of consumption exacerbated the contemporary obsession with exteriority and with image and made the forces of spectacle, commodity and entertainment inseparable. The recognition of the involvement of women in this world of spectacle – not purely as spectacle – offers new ways of considering the relationship between women and display that are not based on the dualistic ideas of voyeurism and objectification. Instead they disrupt the clear, diametrically opposed nature of these two terms and open up a new, unclassified space that existed between the two theoretical extremes. Schwartz's conception of a generalised environment of *flânerie* appropriates the gaze, establishing it as a productive way of exploring the social climate of the *fin de siècle* and extending the boundaries of understandings of looking in order to admit women.

Initially it appears that these two models of looking – the *flâneur* and *flânerie* - have much in common. In both individuals are characterised by their passive gaze at the world of modernity that is evolving around them. Yet in academic tradition they are worlds apart. The *flâneur* has an intellectual heritage that has been denied to the consumer. As a figure he was generally linked to one of the

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[13]Schwartz, p. 2.

experimental and exclusive artistic groups within the city, either as an artist or more frequently as a social associate or patron who occupied a space on the margins of the community. His longevity as an iconic figure, in spite of being the product of an earlier generation, may have been the result of his theoretical compatibility with the cult of the individual that dominated the modernist aesthetics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Peter Nicholls has commented, echoing Baudelaire, 'the conditions of modernity seemed to foster a certain duplicity in the writer, allowing him to see the world, to be at the very centre of the world, and yet to be unseen of the world'.[14] The consumer, conversely, was a figure whose gaze was classified as less objective and considered. The objects that the consumer looked at were the mass-produced commodities that supported the economy, not items considered to be of artistic or philosophical significance; as such the buyer's gaze was deemed to be primarily concerned with the superficial exteriority of products and to be easily led by marketing techniques. There are more intersections between the figures, however, than may immediately seem apparent. In a study of the growth of consumer culture, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*, Rosalind Williams has argued that the *flâneur* was also fundamentally a consumer, to whom a different kind of product was marketed. [15] The rejection of mass commerce subscribed to by the dandy meant that he desired a more exclusive object, but this did not evade the modern motivational forces of possession, spectacle and display. The *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic of visual spectacle and the associated thrill of ownership inseparably connect the figure of the *flâneur* and act of *flânerie.*

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[14]Peter Nicholls, *Modernism: A Literary Guide* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1995), p. 17.
[15]Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California, 1982), p. 110.

The relative sense of liberation that was experienced within the arena of popular entertainment can be interpreted as a feeling that within this space the regulations and constraints of everyday life were temporarily lifted, an idea that can be aligned with approaches to the understanding of tourism and to the tourist as a spectator. The sociologist, John Urry, has defined what he labels 'the tourist gaze' and his understanding is useful in an investigation of the spaces of nineteenth-century popular culture. [16] Urry identifies the tourist gaze as a mode of spectatorship concerned with foreign landscapes and cultures. It is not a stable entity, but contains certain variables, these being the spectator's position in history, the area that the spectator is visiting and the specific cultural and personal identity of the spectator. As a concept it is possible to characterise the tourist gaze as a way of looking that involves a heightened sense of awareness and a greater interest in surroundings, than those evoked by a familiar location, associated with the routines of work and domesticity. The main feature of this gaze, regardless of its historical position – from the eighteenth-century 'grand tour' to the nineteenth-century European city visit – is that it is rooted in conceptions of difference. Interest and alertness are invoked through a landscape and a culture that are different from the habituated norm. The visual stimuli and focus on the fantasy element of display that fashioned the commodity culture of *fin-de-siècle* Paris provide an explicit example of the fundamental conditions Urry stipulates for the presence of the tourist gaze, and this partially explains the sense of liberation and relative moral laxness that pervaded the contemporary mass cultural sphere.

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[16]John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), p. 1.

These different approaches to understanding the diversity of the gaze(s) of the modern metropolis are linked by their focus on the role of commodification; new ways of looking that were engendered by the consumer culture of the late nineteenth-century metropolis. The power of consumer-driven spectacle is integral to modern popular performance, through a combination of its aesthetic influences, the counter-reactions it provoked and the ways in which it necessitated a development and multiplication of viewing positions. The sites of commodity culture not only shaped the desire of the consumer, but also responded to consumer demand in a similar way to the shaping force of the audience of popular entertainment. The department store and the late nineteenth-century *expositions universelles* form two urban spaces where performance and consumption became inseparable. An exploration of these quintessentially modern metropolitan sites that were central to the development of the leisure industry reveals contemporary understandings of corporeality and the centrality of performance to the reworking of these social ideas.

'The language of imagery is also the language of the dream world of the consumer': the department store and the *exposition universelle*. [17]

Figure two is a photographic image taken at the 1900 *exposition universelle* in Paris. In the left foreground of the picture there are two female figures, seemingly unaccompanied, amidst the other, male, spectators and employees. Walking out from under the Eiffel Tower, which arches away from them in the top left hand corner of the image, they both look back towards the *Palais de l'optique* (The Optical Palace), one of the temporary pavilions constructed for the exhibition that reflects the all encompassing motif of the visual that framed the

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[17]Williams, p. 12.

1900 event. This image reveals the female gaze actively involved in – and responding to – the spectacle of *fin-de-siècle* Paris.

Figure two: *Le Palais de l'optique*, Paris (1900)

As the women in figure two walked through the exhibition site, albeit an artificially constructed and ephemeral environment, their gazes were as free as the *flâneur's* to admire and to respond to the vista. It is also interesting to note that, aside from the gentleman who is located directly behind them, these women appear to have been unnoticed by the other individuals visible in the picture who were caught up in their own enjoyment of the display or preoccupied with the direction in which they were walking. The dynamics captured in this photograph reinforce Schwartz's concept of *flânerie* and reveal how the transitory spaces of popular culture supplied an environment where the gendered binaries of voyeur/object and public/private were blurred.

The female spectator is an elusive figure that has been more or less written out of literature from the period. This is exemplified in an extract from *The American*

Tourist in France, published in 1900, which offered the following advice to travellers:

> For the benefit of our gentleman travellers, we give here a list of the leading popular places of entertainments, music halls, public balls, skating rinks etc. *Ladies residing in Paris are never seen in any of these resorts* – the circus excepted. [18] (my emphasis)

The list includes dance halls, the *Moulin Rouge,* the *Jardin de Paris* and the *Folies-Bergère* and café-concerts, including the *Eldorado*. Pictures of the venues taken during the period, however, indicate that it was simply not the case that women did not comprise a part of the audience. In addition to this, the managers of popular entertainment venues became increasingly aware of the financial logic that was involved in attracting a family audience to matinee performances during the 1890s. The afternoon shows undertaken by Loïe Fuller at the *Folies-Bergère* supply an example of this deliberate marketing to a new set of spectators. In an interview Fuller recorded that: '[a]mong my most appreciative spectators are crowds of little children, who are brought by their parents to the morning performances at the *Folies-Bergère*'.[19] The reasons for the exclusion of the female spectator from accounts of the period are suggested by the anxieties evoked by the new role of woman as consumer.

The dialectic relationship that shaped the urban spaces occupied by the department store and the *exposition universelle* was the result of the intersection of the fantasies of metropolitan life and modernity. The department store and the exhibitions made these forces visible through the contemporary aesthetic of display. The importance of sites of commodity culture to an understanding of the early period of modernity has been confirmed by a recent spate of academic

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[18]Anon., *The American Tourist in France*, (Philadelphia: Tourist Publishing Company, 1900), p. 82.
[19]'A Chat with Miss Loïe Fuller', *The Sketch* (April 12, 1893), p. 643.

interest from the fields of historical and cultural studies, but they can also offer a means of exploring the meaning of popular performance in *fin-de-siècle* Paris. Unlike a significant amount of mass cultural entertainment forms which were not documented, many of the spectacles that took place in these two new urban spaces were recorded, in the financial accounts and the advertising of the large stores, or in the press reports and guide books from the exhibitions. Through these chronicles it is possible to gain access to the discursive network that surrounded the contemporary aesthetics of display, a set of ideas that encompassed commodification, power, identity, gender and mass culture.

The emergence of the department store in the nineteenth century was the result of the acceleration of the commodity culture that was to shape and define the *fin-de-siècle* Western world. Until the 1830s French merchants had been restricted by the controlling presence of the guild system, whose legislation ruled that a shop could only sell one specific type of merchandise and prevented any competing store opening within a certain distance of existing establishments. [20] This preclusion of direct competition immediately placed the consumer in a weaker position than the vendor, a situation that was exacerbated by the mutual understanding that entering a store put the customer under a practical obligation to buy, a process that still involved bartering. This early commercial system constructed shopping as a necessary and functional act and not as a pleasurable or leisurely experience.

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[20]For further information surrounding the history of the French department store see, Michael B. Millar, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1981), p. 122 onwards.

The arrival of large establishments, such as the *Bon Marché* in 1852, completely inverted this retail philosophy. Williams identifies the transformation of shopping as the origin of a whole new set of 'social interactions' in the period. [21] The department store marked items at a fixed price and encouraged the customer to browse through the spectacular display of luxury products that were on offer. In addition to this greater level of choice and cheaper prices, the department store furnished Paris with a completely new urban environment. Although, as Williams has commented, it was in general only the bourgeoisie who could afford to make regular purchases, nevertheless, 'the *vision* of a seemingly unlimited profusion of commodities [was] available, indeed nearly unavoidable': the department store was open to all and anyone could browse the goods on display. [22] The birth of the department store in the nineteenth century allowed universal access to the modern metropolitan art of spectacle, through the eradication of buying as a compulsory act. Indeed, the chapter of social history associated with the birth and the rapid rise of commodity culture has often been referred to as that of the democratisation of consumption. The commingling of different classes and sexes within the department store generated the new system of social interactions identified by Williams, the diversity of people that would normally only be encountered on the streets of the city had been brought inside, into an enclosed area.

The argument has been made that the artificial construction of the metropolitan arenas of commodity culture, such as the department store and the *exposition universelle,* to a set of capitalist and patriarchal design principles reduces their importance as potentially liberating spaces for a diversity of gazes. Although it

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[21]Williams, p. 67.
[22]Williams, p. 3.

is clear that one major aim in the creation of these environments was their appeal to the female gaze – and that consequently they often included tenets of domestic design – this was for a multitude of reasons. The anxieties that surrounded constructs of gender and the associated desire to contain and protect women in the domestic sphere were undoubtedly powerful ideological forces. It was also necessary, however, to recognise the importance of the female consumer as an economic power, a notion that is reflected in the design of environments that would appeal to her.

The appropriation of the domestic into the fantasies of metropolitan life, illustrated in the department stores' displays, reveals striking differences between the visual spectacles of commodity culture and the characteristic ideal of the late nineteenth-century Parisian home. The need to appeal to the female gaze often resulted in the integration of elements of the transgressive as well as the sanctioned domestic into these carefully constructed spectacles. Emile Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883) focuses on a late nineteenth-century department store, The Ladies' Paradise. Zola's naturalistic aesthetic meant that he spent an extended period of research time at the *Bon Marché* prior to writing the novel, and it is thus frequently cited as a reasonably reliable documentation of a contemporary establishment. At The Ladies' Paradise, the necessity of seducing the female consumer, rather than offering her a recreation of the familiar, sanctioned, domestic space is clear. In a passage detailing the store's silk department, Zola makes the mental, emotional and physical impact of the spectacle upon the female consumers explicit:

> At the far end of the hall, around one of the small cast-iron columns which supported the glass roof, material was streaming down like a bubbling sheet of water, falling from above and spreading out on to the floor. First pale satins and soft silks were gushing out: royal satins and renaissance satins, with the pearly shades of spring water; light silks as transparent as crystal – Nile green, turquoise, blossom pink, Danube blue. Next came the thicker fabrics, the marvellous satins and the duchess silks, in warm shades, rolling in great waves. And at the bottom, as if in a fountain-basin, the heavy materials, the damasks, the brocades, the silver and gold silks, were sleeping on a deep bed of velvets- velvets of all kinds, black, white, coloured, embossed on a background of silk or satin, their shimmering flecks forming a still lake in which reflections of the sky and of the countryside seemed to dance. Women pale with desire were leaning over as if to look at themselves. Faced with this wild cataract, they all remained standing there, filled with the secret fear of being caught up in all this luxury and with an irresistible desire to throw themselves into it and be lost. [23]

Initially, Zola's description of the vision of the silk hall, and the power that the display has over its female audience, appear to conform to ideas of femininity that assume women are both easily seduced and superficial in their vanity. This is the same set of discourses that Rachel Bowlby has identified in her study of the representation of consumer culture in nineteenth-century literature, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*:

> The essential point is that the making of willing consumers readily fitted into the available ideological paradigm of a seduction of women by men, in which women would be addressed as yielding objects to the powerful male subject forming, and informing them of, their desires. The success of the capitalist sales project rested on the passive acceptance or complicity of its would-be buyers, and neither side of the developing relationship can be thought of independently of the other. [24]

Bowlby emphasises the dialectic nature of commodity culture and the significance of the female consumer as a social figure of the *fin de siècle*. This is a key element of an understanding of the nineteenth-century female consumer that will be explored further with reference to the fashion industry.

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[23]Emile Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise*, ed. and trans. by Brian Nelson (Oxford: Oxford University, 1995), pp. 103-4.
[24]Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 20.

There are, however, another two diverse and complex sets of metaphors inherent in Zola's construction of the silk hall at The Ladies' Paradise, concentrated on the themes of exoticism and modernity. The tumbling silks are framed within the discourses of orientalism, which results in the image being pervaded by a sense of other worldliness and fantasy. This implicit focus on the 'otherness' of modernity, through the trope of exoticism, reflects important *fin-de-siècle* cultural ideas and anxieties that relate to transgressive femininity. The presence of the oriental in Zola's vision reflects the concurrent threat and thrill located at the heart of the modern experience and defined by Bermann. The technological developments of modernity are also at the core of the spectacle of the silk hall, for they made the colours and the collective effect of the fabrics possible. The nineteenth-century fashion industry did reflect the feminine elements of beauty and the physical, but it was also 'an important cultural site for the manifestation of the 'modern': it was urban and it constituted the type of visual spectacle which characterised the city'. [25]

The late nineteenth-century taste for bright colours, luxurious – and often newly developed – fabrics and large amounts of costume jewellery, illustrated by Zola's description of the silk department, undoubtedly made the Parisian woman an immediate and obvious object for the eyes. This is revealed in the emergence of the figure of the *Parisienne* during the period, the fashionable, beautiful woman exemplified in the works of James Tissot, for example figure three 'The Shop Girl' (1883).

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[25]Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett, *Fashioning the Feminine: Representation and Women's Fashion from the Fin de Siècle to the Present* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002), p. 5.

Figure Three: James Tissot, 'The Shop Girl' (1883)

Tissot's paintings classify late nineteenth-century womanhood through a recreation of characteristic middle-class metropolitan rituals and scenes, to the extent that the women he portrays are named after these elements of the modern city. This link between femininity, modernity and the evolution of commodification is further developed in the way that Tissot draws upon the imagery of the *Parisienne* that was contained in fashion plates from the period. [26] The fashion plate was a retail tool that was employed to sell clothing through its inclusion in press advertisements and in store mail order catalogues and, like contemporary art, it relied upon the notion of using representations of women to define and contain an ideal, secure female image. Fashion plates artists frequently copied poses that were familiar from famous paintings of women, reaching back to periods when conceptions of female sexuality and erotic power had been defined more clearly and thus were considered to be less threatening.

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[26]Valerie Steele discusses the relationship between art and the fashion plate in her study, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University, 1988), p. 100 onwards.

The presence of these archaic female images in these new images can be read as an attempt to rein in the possibilities offered to women by modernity. It is telling that, in spite of developments in the world of photography, photographs were used very rarely to advertise clothes in the last quarter of the century. This discomfort with the reality of the photograph as a replacement for the idealism and strategy of the fashion print emphasises the central ambiguity of the position of woman within this area of the fashion industry: women could be adorned in the fabrics and manufacturing techniques of modernity, but only represented by older methods that allowed reality to be tempered. [27]

The understanding of Paris as the fashion capital of the world was well established by the nineteenth century and the location of the female form at the centre of ideas surrounding modernity and its concomitant commodity culture was largely due to the success of the industry. The anxiety that was evoked by the economic power of the female consumer was intensified by the fashion sector, where female corporeality was unavoidably placed at the centre of a purely capitalist commercial discourse.

The contrast between the opulence of female dress and the stark, black coat and tails that provided the typical attire of the bourgeois male further reinforces the striking nature of images of *fin-de-siècle* women. Male dress offered a level of anonymity that was unavailable to women, but the assumption that this meant that the male body was not a site of attention and discussion during the period needs to be reconsidered. The male body's role as a social signifier may not be

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[27]The transparency of this attempted control over the representation of women was counterbalanced by the high involvement of women within the fashion industry, ranging from the Parisian women who acted as seamstresses and milliners to the artist and models of the fashion plate.

as immediately obvious, or as visually striking, as that of his female counterpart, but it nonetheless formed the locus of the gaze. In her study of the meaning of the body in *fin-de-siècle* French art, *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-siècle France,* Tamar Garb has suggested that the collective nature of masculine dress may have been a reaction to the pressures on the contemporary male to act as a potent symbol of virility, both in domestic and national terms. [28] This was the result of the significant decline of the birth rate in France in the second half of the nineteenth century, coupled with the number of young male lives that had been lost during the period's numerous military campaigns and internal conflicts, eliminating a large percentage of potential fathers from the generation. Questions surrounding the continuity of France as a major European and international power and the country's ability to defend itself were evoking increasing anxiety towards the end of the century as a consequence of this.

Fin-de-siècle conceptions of virile masculinity tended to be associated with the physicality of the individual male subject and thus sited the man as the subject of the scrutinising socio-medico gaze. Garb reads contemporary male clothing as a means to '[...] conceal men's bodies rather than to draw attention to their corporeal idiosyncrasies. They were armoured and protected in their pantaloons, coat tails and buttoned-up presences'. [29] As male clothing became more conservative, female fashion became progressively more striking. This synchronous development is in line with the city of the day: female fashion incorporated and celebrated the spectacle of the nineteenth-century cityscape, emphasising the body, where male fashion belied an intrinsic fear of and

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[28]Tamar Garb, *Bodies of Modernity: Figures and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), p. 33.
[29]Garb, p. 36.

discomfort with these new developments. As chapter two will explore, corporeality and fashion were at the heart of the dualistic approach to gender during the period, but they also reveal an interesting divide in the approach to urban spaces in the city. The chaotic spaces of commodity culture, mass-produced goods and popular entertainment were affiliated with the feminine and the areas of the city devoted to business and to science were understood as male territory, within a system that inherently reflected the conflicting feelings of anxiety and excitement in the same ways as fashion.

Zola's scene at The Ladies' Paradise also raises the question of who the silks were bought and worn for. The fashion industry was partially linked to the pleasuring of the male gaze and the silks on sale at the store were designed to have precisely the same entrancing effect on men when they were transformed into dresses. The 'mechanisms of seduction', which Brian Nelson has identified as being central to the nineteenth-century department store, are intrinsically linked to the development of the modern fashion industry. [30] They are not, however, exclusive to women: commodity culture and modern fashion reflected the metropolis's generalised fascination with 'the erotic power and charm of novelty and display'. [31] Dress was intrinsically linked to the contemporary construction of physical ideals at the *fin de siècle,* but the ideas it encompasses are significantly more complex than those of women simply being exploited or constricted through fashion. The dialectical relationship between women and fashion, identified earlier by Bowlby, can be further developed through the

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[30]Brian Nelson, introduction to Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise*, p. xi.
[31]Steele, p. 10.

influence of the female performer on contemporary dress. In April 1893, the English journal, *The Sketch*, recorded that:

> Paris has gone mad over Miss Loïe Fuller. Not only is there the Loïe Fuller skirt, but the Bon Marché and Louvre are selling Loïe Fuller hats Loïe Fuller ribbons, Loïe Fuller shoes and even Loïe Fuller petticoats. [32]

The female celebrity thus became the starting point, the creator of an initial, individual look that was then emulated throughout society. It was often the female celebrities who shaped the fashions of the day, their public role allowing them the freedom to develop and popularise new styles. In this way, although it is true that the products of commodity culture were often based upon contemporary ideas of femininity, fashion was not immediately prescribed by the order of the day, but often by the women of the city.

In addition to this complication of the inclusion of femininity in design, by the end of the nineteenth century the distinctions between domestic - or interior – design, art and gender were far less easy to define. The *fin de siècle* witnessed the Art Nouveau movement, a small-scale aesthetic that was quickly adopted and popularised by mass culture, transmitted through the enduring designs of figures such as Liberty and Tiffany. The perceived need to synchronise the elements of the spectacle of commodity culture with ideas of the feminine and the domestic disrupted the binaries of public/private that shaped *fin-de-siècle* ideas surrounding gender and clearly displays the late nineteenth-century's recognition of the power of the female spectator in her new socio-economic role as a leisured consumer.

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[32]'A Chat with Miss Loïe Fuller', *The Sketch* (April 12 1893), p. 642.

It is difficult to disassociate the gender implications that are intrinsic to the twenty-first century understanding of shopping as a female leisure activity, but it is important to clarify that the department store in *fin-de-siècle* Paris was a central symbol of the development and spectacle of modernity. Even in the simplest practical terms, the stores depended upon modern technological developments, for without the advanced lighting techniques that were offered by electricity and the relatively recent ability to manufacture large sheets of pane glass for window displays, the spectacular role of the department store would have been significantly diminished. Walter Benjamin located the establishments as the point where ideas surrounding modernity intersected, the moment where *flânerie* was put 'to work for profit'. [33] Benjamin's statement highlights the complex interrelationship between commerciality, spectacle and spectatorship in the *fin-de-siècle* urban consciousness.

Complicating the nature of the spaces of commodity culture demands a movement away from the understanding that they formed a one-dimensional reflection of ideas regarding gender. This can be further developed through a consideration of whether society would have been entirely comfortable with the production of the level of palpable desire in women that Zola describes. This conflicted with contemporary ideas about femininity that required women to remain as passive as possible. The connection between women and desire at the *fin de siècle* was the source of significant anxiety that was linked to ideas surrounding embodiment, feminism and sexuality. Zola's knowing description of The Ladies' Paradise reveals both his focus on the tensions that were evoked by the necessity of positioning the woman as spectator within consumer culture

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[33]Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard Univeristy, 1999), p. 35.

and his interest in the changing roles of women in society during the period. Paul Greenhalgh has noted that, by 1880, French consumer goods were commonly understood as emblematic of a type of womanhood: not the moral protector of the domestic sphere, but rather symbolic of a 'luxuriant, mysterious and erotic individual, whose wildness was combined peculiarly with orthodox middle-class values'. [34] Greenhalgh's statement reveals the connection between Zola's description of the social anxieties and tensions evoked by the necessary presence of women in the public sphere.

The presence of gender ideology within commodity culture, and the tensions that it caused, raises questions surrounding the dualistic approach of late nineteenth-century society. Identifying shopping as a leisure activity and the consumer as spectator makes it possible to trace an initial equation of the 'High'/'Low' divide in artistic culture with concepts of masculinity and femininity. The interpretation of the chaotic spaces of popular culture as inherently feminine was extended to include the mass-produced consumer goods, the result of the perceived subordinate value of the commodified product to the aesthetic object.

The success of the establishment of the department store in validating the right of a woman to be in a public, urban space alone, actively participating in this new version of *flânerie*, marks an important moment in the transition of cultural spaces. Shopping alone had become such an acceptable occupation for women by the late nineteenth century that it was possible for them to use it as an alibi. Alain Corbin notes that the *maisons de rendezvous*, the high-class brothels where bourgeois women either worked as prostitutes or met their lovers, were

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[34]Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and Wrold's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1988), p. 189.

frequently located near to the *grands magasins,* a tactical positioning 'which allowed women to frequent them in the afternoon without arousing too much attention'. [35] As well as offering a relative level of liberation to the individual woman, the creation of these authorised, public spaces of female consumption resulted in a cross-section of the female population becoming more visible in general. The presence of the department store disputed the ethos that the middle-class woman should remain within the safety of the home, the domestic refuge, for the burgeoning economy indirectly relied upon her doing completely the opposite. As Paul Greenhalgh has stated, '[women's] inevitable inclusion as consumers meant they had a certain power of veto which afforded them consideration'. [36]

The modern department store shared more than simply its mass cultural roots with the popular entertainment industry. Within the establishments the urban crowd of consumers were positioned as an audience, for the proprietors of the stores quickly recognised the appeal of spectacle and its power as an effective marketing tool. Williams makes the link between this shift in the commercial world and the entertainment industry of mass culture explicit in her statement that the department store was a space where the 'audience' was 'entertained by commodities', an idea that is echoed by Millar in his history of the *Bon Marché*, where he concludes that, 'selling consumption was a matter of seduction and showmanship'. [37] The management of the *Bon Marché* fully exploited this power with the instigation of regular social and artistic events within the store that included concerts and art exhibitions.

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[35]Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850,* trans. by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University, 1990), p. 175.
[36]Greenhalgh, p. 174.
[37]Williams, p. 67.

The spectacle of consumption did not only owe its existence to modernity, but it also reflected its characteristics and its ideas of entertainment. The department store's audiences were witness to an inherently transient performance space where the displays and spectacles, fashions and trends were all temporary. The similarities between Zola's description of the silk department of The Ladies' Paradise and the superficial opulence of the *Théâtre des Variétés*, where the eponymous heroine makes her stage debut in his earlier novel *Nana*, draw attention to the central aesthetic of display and surface appearance that unified popular culture. The emphasis on the illusion of a fairy-landscape in the representation of the theatre echoes the silk hall, the difference lies in that, in contrast to the newness of the specifically built department store, the theatre's age and state of disrepair makes the attempt to create the pretence far clearer:

> By now the house was resplendent. Tall jets of gas lit the great crystal chandelier with a blaze of pink and yellow flames, which rained down a stream of light from gallery to pit. The scarlet velvet of the seats were shot with tints of lake, while all the gilding shone brightly [...] The footlights were turned up, and with a sudden flood of light set fire to the curtain, whose heavy crimson drapery had all the richness of a fairy-tale palace, and contrasted sharply with the shabbiness of the proscenium arch, where cracks showed the plaster under the gilding. [38]

The complex network of interactions between performance and commerce that were sited within the new urban space occupied by the department store reveals themes that are central to an exploration of the contemporary popular stage. These specific sites of modernity acted as the extreme example of the adoption of art to support commodity culture. As Williams has remarked, '[i]n this aesthetic demi-monde, exotic décor exists as an intermediate form of life between art and

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[38]Emile Zola, *Nana*, ed. and trans. by George Holden (London: Penguin, 1972), pp. 26-7.

commerce'. [39] In these spaces aesthetic agendas were irrelevant, the sole function of any display's visual appeal was to seduce the consumer, this can be paralleled with the argument behind many negative readings of the popular stage as a manifestation of 'Low' culture. *Fin-de-siècle* Parisians were trained in the visual codes of spectacle that they encountered on a day-to-day basis in the mass cultural environment of the city, but there were other events that occurred on a less regular basis which extended the motifs of fantasy and fairyland that recurred in the department stores. The *expositions universelles* that took place in Paris during the second half of the nineteenth century provide a strong example of the developments of display as it entered more fully into the realm of performance.

'World Exhibitions are places of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish.' [40]

The audience of the late nineteenth-century Parisian department store also formed a significant section of the spectatorship at the international exhibitions. These two sites shared their role as meticulously constructed spaces of performance and display that were both wholly dependent upon and helped to form and develop the interrelated forces of image and consumption, an idea that Walter Benjamin articulated when he explicitly linked the meaning of the nineteenth-century exhibition with the developing commodity culture of the Western world. Alongside displays that focused on science, progress and entertainment, every eleven years the owners of Paris's stores had the opportunity to display their goods and their image to the much wider audience of the *expositions universelles.* They provided a unique environment, an

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[39]Williams, p. 71.
[40]Benjamin, p. 7.

atmosphere of the commercial carnivalesque that was a quintessential product of its time. The exhibitions acted as an intensified microcosm of the all-encompassing desire for, and celebration of, the spectacle that shaped the mass culture of late nineteenth-century Paris. As Roger Shattuck has noted, '[t]he exhibitions turned every resident and visitor in the city into an actor in the extravaganza of human progress and vanity'. [41] The intertwined nature of progress and vanity that Shattuck establishes here was central to the organisational logic behind the exhibitions, an idea that will be developed further later in this chapter.

Figure four: 'The Parisian Dream City'

[41]Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant Garde in France, 1885-1918* (New York:: Vintage, 1968), p. 45.

The *exposition universelle* was as central to the contemporary mythological understanding and representations of Paris across Europe and the world as the city's boulevards, writers or painters. The city self-consciously chose how to put itself on ultimate display during the exhibition periods. This is not only true of the range of buildings that were commissioned and constructed for the events, some of which were temporary and some of which became the most famous landmarks in the metropolis (including the Eiffel Tower, the Grand Palais and the Petit Palais and the Pont Alexandre III), but also of the concept of exhibiting a particular Parisian identity that the events affirmed. During the exhibitions a miniature city was created within the real metropolis; an utopian reflection of Paris that excluded the poverty and the social management problems of the real environment. The success of this aim is evinced by figure four, the image that was selected for the front cover of an American guide to the 1900 *exposition universelle,* entitled *the Parisian Dream City.* Here many of the event's buildings are depicted along the banks of the Seine, which is lit with rays of light that are reminiscent of portrayals of moments of religious apotheosis.

The late nineteenth-century exhibitions were massive events within the Western world and it is important that *Paris 1900* is placed within its international context. The development of organisational skills and improvement in marketing strategies is indicated by the tendency to view the exhibitions as a phenomenon of the 1900s. The first exhibition in France actually took place in 1797, instigated by the republican government as an attempt to reinstate a sentiment of national identity and security. It was in the nineteenth century, however, that these events were recognised as a means of promoting a country's identity to the rest of the modern world. Worldwide, from 1855 until the end of the century,

there was an event involving twenty or more countries every two years. The extent of the shared social discourses and ideological transmission can only be imagined. [42]

The late nineteenth-century exhibitions reveal one transition in the nature of the display that is central to a study of the role of contemporary spectacle and entertainment. The early events were clearly committed to the display of progress. Significant emphasis was placed on examples of new technologies characterised by an educational approach. The general public, however, did not continue to be impressed by these isolated artefacts of modernity and it became clear that a new approach was necessary if exhibitions were to continue to be commercially viable. The answer was to integrate the theme of progress with popular attractions, and France was the first nation to realise and explore this shift in public taste. As Paul Greenhalgh states in a study of the importance of these events, ' [s]o-called high and popular culture mixed freely in an environment where all rules appear to have been temporarily suspended'.[43]

The early exhibitions had seen the mainstream entertainment establish itself around the perimeters of the site, outside the legitimate display space. During the nineteenth century, the popular entertainment elements were gradually integrated into the exhibition area and finally ended up at the very core of the planning of the events. Although this incorporation into a self-consciously middle-class environment necessarily resulted in the sanitisation of the spectacles on offer, it remains a crucial moment for the figure of the *fin-de-siècle* entertainer. Women, in particular, tended to hold recognised active involvement

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[42]Greenhalgh, p. 15.
[43]Greenhalgh, p. 42.

with the exhibition solely as performers. This transition from entertainment being considered as secondary to the serious business of the exhibition to its acceptance as an integral part of the event transformed ideas and images central to the representation of femininity on a world stage.

> The exhibition smothers its disparate parts in an ensemble which can be accused of anything except lifelessness; life seethes in this immense reservoir of energy and that's the main thing. [44]

The 1900 exhibition is generally accepted to have been the most spectacular and well organised of the French events. It opened its gates to the general public on April 14. The organisers had created a complete utopian, fantasy landscape; tropes of the oriental and the fairy tale pervaded the site. As one contemporary account explains, '[t]he public was expecting a fair with sensational shows and it was offered a sort of dream-city'. [45] The diverse elements of the exhibition – from scientific displays, to retailers to fairground rides - seem to have been tied together, almost organically, by this emphasis on the element of the fantastic. Contemporary descriptions of the site frequently turn to the language and symbols of hallucinatory states in order to convey the overall effect of the area, claiming, ' [...] it is an architectural hotchpotch [sic.] conceived in the dream of an opium smoker',[46] or, ' [a]n opium smoker might have conceived this fairy palace after reading the Arabian Nights'. [47] This element of the fantastical can also be seen in the metaphorical representation of Paris selected for the American guide to the exhibition that was included earlier.

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[44]Melchoir de Vogue, cited in Philippe Julian, *The Triumph of Art Nouveau: Paris Exhibition 1900* (London: Phaidon, 1974), p. 56.
[45]Charles Simond, cited in Julian, p. 16.
[46]Jean Lorrain, cited in Julian, p. 62.
[47]Alex M. Thompson, cited in Greenhalgh, p. 47.

There has been a recent surge of interest surrounding the nineteenth-century world fairs within cultural studies and this has led to the suggestion that the contemporary literary sources that surrounded the events have been over-used and the evidence that they offer should be replaced with more reliable, factual historical material. This argument is wholly valid when applied to the attempt to present a sociological reconstruction of the exhibitions, for example the understanding of the audience structure, or the aim of the exhibitors. The aim here, however, is to reconstruct and consider the fairy tale spectacle – the illusion of the events – and thus literary responses still prove to be an extremely useful tool. Not only do they allow access to records of subjective reactions, though admittedly not a universal response as the authors of extant works were generally affluent and educated, but they also had a huge influence on other people who went to the exhibition. The most renowned of these literary commentators was Jean Lorrain, whose regular articles in *L'Echo de Paris* aided the organisers in the battle to overcome the initial sense of derision that shaped the *fin-de-siècle* response from the Parisian community towards *Paris 1900.* [48]

The limited liberation of the gaze that was offered to women by the department store was increased in the exhibition spaces of the late nineteenth century. As Paul Greenhalgh has stated, '[i]nternational exhibitions were one of the first and most effective cultural arenas in which women expressed their misgivings with established patriarchy. They provided one of the few places where women could exert influence, due mainly to the fact that they comprised 50% of the audience.'[49] Women also actively participated in these events on many levels,

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[48]For further discussion of the significant role that contemporary writers played in the publicity and success of the 1900 *exposition universelle* see Julian, p. 197.
[49]Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, p. 174.

from the display of female works of art in *Le Palais des Femmes* (The Palace of Women), to their roles as performers, waitresses, barmaids and cashiers in the many ticket offices. Jane Avril was employed as a cashier at the 1889 exhibition. Greenhalgh notes, however, that the role of women at the 1900 exhibition was not restricted solely to their presence as consumers, exhibitors or employees. Instead the French approach to women, 'could be found everywhere on the site as part of the total ideological atmosphere'. [50] The French understood their cultural premise to be broadly 'feminine': the emphasis on display and Paris's reputation as the city of pleasure were inherently linked to the chaotic, 'feminine' nature of the spaces of mass culture. In this, the areas of commerce and the myths of femininity become inseparable.

The commodity culture of the *fin de siècle*, represented here by the department store and the universal exhibitions and the popular stage, were intrinsically linked by their roles in the development of the mass culture of modernity. The centrality of spectacle to the success of Paris's department stores and exhibitions, with the resulting presence of a level of self-conscious theatricality in commerce, fostered and was fostered by the burgeoning entertainment industry. The modern city's dependence upon display propagated the plethora of metropolitan gazes that enabled the popular female performer to both question and resist contemporary understandings of women and to experiment with avant-garde performance on the popular stage.

The main impediment to the analysis of the positive dialectic between feminism(s) and early modern dance has been the dependence on 'male gaze

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[50]Greenhalgh, p. 188.

theory' that has framed a significant amount of analytical approaches to nineteenth-century dance and performance. This has been particularly true when the main figure onstage is female. It is the assumed mono-presence of this patriarchal voyeurism, and its power to shape and control female sexuality, that appears to necessitate a negative response to the work of performance artists such as Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller. The problem of the voyeuristic patriarchal gaze *is* an important factor when considering the late nineteenth-century popular stage, but its presence cannot be allowed to simply negate the difference that *fin-de-siècle* female performers made – or intended to make – to assumptions about gender. As Ann Daly argues in an article that rejects 'male gaze theory' as an appropriate approach to the work of Isadora Duncan:

> The male gaze theory forces the feminist dance scholar into a no-win situation that turns on an exceedingly unproductive 'succeed or fail' criterion [...] The dancer or choreographer under consideration will always be condemned as a reinforcement of the patriarchal status quo, despite any transgressive behaviour, because by definition, that which is communicated arises from within the fabric of culture, that is to say, within patriarchy. [51]

The location of patriarchal voyeurism as one of a multitude of contemporary metropolitan gazes in nineteenth-century Paris, removes this theoretical impasse and allows a more realistic and productive analysis of modern dance and the female performer. The final set of gazes that had a direct effect on the creative output of Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller is that of the avant-garde in the city. The avant-garde gaze can be juxtaposed with the consumer's gaze, as John Henderson has stated:

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[51] Ann Daly, cited in Susan Manning, 'The Female Dancer and the Male Gaze: Feminist Critiques of Early Modern Dance', *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, ed. by Jane C. Desmond (Durham; London: Duke University, 1997), 153-66, p. 159.

> Avant-gardism then becomes in a sense the opposite of success, and more particularly in the theatre, for example, an attempt to extend the limits of the possible, to surpass what has already been attained. [52]

There were many intersections in these gaze(s), however, as the earlier discussion of the close relationship of the consumer and the dandy/*flâneur* suggested. Avril's and Fuller's performance styles and the interest that the avant-garde movements of *fin-de-siècle* Paris showed in their work disrupted the opposition of the mass cultural gaze and the avant-garde gaze in a manner that will be discussed further in chapter three.

The diversity of the metropolitan gaze(s) that shaped the audience of mass culture did not, however, result in the diminishing of the anxiety that was evoked by the centrality of the female body to the performance of the popular celebrity. These concerns surrounding embodiment can be traced in contemporary responses and in retrospective considerations of Jane Avril's and Loïe Fuller's work. The next chapter explores the problematic territory of female corporeality within performance and feminist criticism. It suggests that the removal of one male gaze and the complication of the binary of voyeurism/objectification can allow space for the female body to be renegotiated and viewed in a positive light, reinstating the corporeal presence of the active, onstage performer as a site of resistance that challenged the contemporary urban myths of femininity.

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[52]John Henderson, *The First Avant Garde 1887-1894: Sources of the Modern French Theatre* (London: Harrap, 1971), p. 4.

Chapter Two: Performing Gender in the City of Spectacle: Femininity, Corporeality and the Urban Myth

> Modernity produced its own image of the body. According to the dictates of science and philosophy, modern men and women were expected to look dramatically different from one another [...]
> If men and women were to occupy their prescribed roles, then they had to look their parts, inhabiting these social fictions as if they were either inevitable or acquired without effort. Appearance testified to the maintenance of a social order based on visible distinctions. If boundaries were transgressed, chaos could ensue. [1]

> Bodies have all the explanatory power of minds. Indeed, for feminist purposes the focus on bodies, bodies in their concrete specifities, has the added bonus of inevitably raising the question of sexual difference in a way that the mind does not. [2]

The centrality of display to the late nineteenth-century Parisian metropolitan experience, and the focus on the body that it incorporated, act as evidence of the central shaping forces of societies that are self-consciously driven by a desire for the spectacular. As Tamar Garb has made clear in the quotation cited above, however, the body as the site of the modern gaze(s) was not solely the result of commodification and the industries of mass culture. Rather, the external appearances of men and women acted as a key element of the generalised attempt to establish and to verify secure social definitions of gender and sexuality at the *fin de siècle*. This chapter seeks to explore how it was possible for the popular construction of femininity, that relied heavily on spiritual, disembodied ideals, to coexist with the pervasive intense focus on the visual, and thus the physical reality of the human form, demanded by contemporary culture. If, as Garb has suggested,

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[1]Tamar Garb, *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p.11.
[2]Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1994), p. viii.

social order in the nineteenth century relied upon clear visible distinctions between men and women, the possibility of subverting contemporary ideology through display and embodiment was significant in the modern metropolis.

The origins of the late nineteenth-century concept of sexuality as an overt, visible set of bodily and ornamental codes can be traced in a wider theoretical system of European thought that had developed over the previous century. As Thomas Laquer has noted in his history of sex, gender and the body: '[t]he dominant, though by no means universal, view since the eighteenth century has been that there are two stable, incommensurate, opposite sexes and that the political, economic, and cultural lives of men and women, their gender roles, are somehow based on these "facts".' [3] The social philosophy that emerges from this conviction is therefore founded on the fundamental understanding of men and women as classifiable opposites of each other, the primary binary from which the *fin-de-siècle* system of dualities evolved. As the previous chapter revealed and an exploration of corporeality will draw out, the *fin-de-siècle* anxieties that surrounded gender and sexuality essentially arose from the disruption of these clearly defined boundaries. The reliance on the obvious field of the visual – where the difference between men and women could be seen – was an attempt to negate the threat of this disturbance to prevailing ideas. Thus one area of the society of spectacle can be read as an attempt to transmit stable images to the widest possible audience and, in doing so, to secure social ideas.

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[3]Thomas Laquer, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University, 1994), p. 5.

The affiliation between *fin-de-siècle* spectacle and corporeality was, therefore, inherently linked to the industry and technologies of mass culture. The 'social fictions' that arose from the demand that the body occupied the role of a constant signifier are revealed in the resulting evolution of the urban myth during the period. The construction of familiar and ideologically loaded images of femininity in the urban myth, and their dissemination through the new technologies of mass media, reveals the ways in which movement and embodiment offered moments of agency within the modern city. The possibility of historically specific corporeal states allowing resistance to ideas surrounding gender, within the sight of the multiple gazes of the modern metropolis, locates the late nineteenth-century female body as a potentially positive and expressive force that was intrinsically linked to questions of consciousness and subjectivity. Furthermore, the link between visual culture and the popular stage makes the corporeality of the female performer a key representative of these ideas. In the world of mass culture, the female body, although still subject to objectification, was active and present across the breadth of the city's modern, urban spaces.

Any attempt to engage with societies that were preoccupied with spectacle raises the unavoidable questions that surround the objectification of the human body. With this in mind, it is important to acknowledge that the set of cultural assumptions that emerged from the social focus on the body resulted in negative concepts of embodiment for both men and women. Garb's analysis of the role of the body during the period, cited in the previous chapter, makes it clear that men, too, were

judged on their outward appearance, both in terms of their dress and of their physical stature and attributes. If the prevailing concern was that men and women should look dramatically different from each other, then necessarily they would both be scrutinised in the process of substantiating that contrast. Within a world that was fixated on display no body was exempt from a role as a visual signifier.

In spite of this, the predominant use of the female body as an ornament within commodity culture has resulted in such periods being considered as wholly negative environments for women, evinced in the sense of unease that characterises the majority of feminist approaches to such eras. This discomfort is rooted in the assumption that the sole socio-political role available for the female body was as an erotic signifier: an object within a voyeuristic and patriarchal system of sexuality. As the quotes from Elizabeth Grosz and Tamar Garb that opened this chapter suggest, however, the situation in the late nineteenth-century metropolis was significantly more complex than this response indicates.

In her argument for the renegotiation of the ways in which the female body has been understood historically, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism,* the philosopher Elizabeth Grosz has questioned the productivity of the feminist theoretical tendency to accept the assumptions of mainstream Western philosophical thought that have rendered the body a 'conceptual blind spot'. [4] Patriarchal society's attempts to define Woman as innately connected to the body, in terms of a natural level of animalistic, irrational and primitive behaviour, has resulted in the feminist,

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[4]Grosz, p. 3.

somatophobic evasion of any system of thought that identifies corporeality as a positive force. As an alternative to this subordination of the body to questions of mind and spirit, Grosz inverts these ideas in order to explore the body as a site of possible resistance to ideological constructions of gender. She traces a series of hierarchical divisions that spring from the dichotomous mind/body divide, including the central dualities of male/female and reason/passion (rational/irrational) raised by this thesis, and an extended set of binaries, sense/sensibility and psychology/biology. In each case Grosz notes:

> The subordinated term is merely the negation or denial, the absence or privitation of the primary term, its fall from grace; the primary term defines itself by expelling its other and in this process establishes its own boundaries and borders to create an identity for itself. [5]

The result of this oppositional approach to the classification of embodiment is that the body - and by extension understandings and representations of the state of corporeality - have been classified as *what is not the mind*. Physical embodiment has become the locus of the inferior human qualities that cannot be linked to the psychological elements of life. The body's role as a self-contained, almost non-entity, however, is simultaneously problematised by its position as a powerful signifier, the visible symbol of the link between the human race and the animal world.

The relationship between embodied and disembodied understandings of identity and subjectivity at the *fin de siècle* was complicated further by both scientific and popular understandings of the body as the site of psychic pain; the area where the

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[5]Grosz, p. 3.

modern world and the existential self collided. Contemporary ideas suggested that psychological illness could be read through a decoding of physical reactions, most notably in the late nineteenth-century fascination with hysteria and the reverberation of madness in anxieties surrounding the instability of the categorisation of femininity. The figure of the hysteric is a key reference point that will be discussed further in chapter four with reference to the life and performance of Jane Avril. The perceived intrinsic link between a lack of reason (or irrationality) and women exacerbated the role of the female body as the signifier of the animalistic elements of human life. In *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980,* Elaine Showalter revealed the ways in which the female body has been adopted throughout history as a cultural symbol of irrationality. [6] This link between the body, the irrational and women is a result of the opposition that Grosz identifies between body and mind and it discloses another significant reason for the tendency in feminist theory to distrust the area of embodiment.

The academic and popular inclination to read the body as a negative entity is partially a result of the elitist, masculinist philosophical tradition that Grosz has identified in her study. In this way, it is a response that is framed by the qualities and ideas that the body has been infused with through these discursive practices, rather than a reaction to what corporeality has actually signified at a given historical moment. By commencing the process of questioning the assumptions that have simultaneously partially developed and been absorbed into these theoretical approaches, it is possible to relocate the body at the core of ideas surrounding

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[6]Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 5.

gender, performance and expression. *Fin-de-siècle* Paris's preoccupation with putting itself and its citizens on display makes the city a valuable environment for such an investigation: the democratisation of spectacle and the focus on the external appearance of individuals from a diversity of viewing positions complicates questions of embodiment and allows the meaning of corporeality to be approached from different angles. Within the new urban environment of the modern metropolis the on and off stage presence of the late nineteenth-century female performer as a signifier of the new phenomenon of the mass media personality lends itself to an investigation of corporeality in these terms. Placed in the specific historical context of the *fin de siècle*, the female celebrity acted as an overt and self-conscious positioning of the sexual, active and expressive body as the locus of the metropolitan gaze(s). This makes it is possible to analyse the *fin-de-siècle* popular stage as a space in which, as Grosz has stipulated, bodies could be seen to have had all the explanatory powers of minds and where corporeality could be used to realise ideas in a society where other forms of expression were restricted.

In an article exploring images of women in late nineteenth-century Montmartre, 'Images of Pleasure and Vice: Women of the Fringe', Elizabeth K. Menon has noted the contemporary tendency to use the female body as a representation of the mass-culture industry: '[w]omen were associated with the available sex and alcohol along with the performance aspects of dance and song that took place in the various cabarets'. [7] This trend was a development of representations and understandings of

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[7]Elizabeth K. Menon, 'Images of Pleasure and Vice: Women of the Fringe', in *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture*. ed. by Gabriel P. Weisberg (New Brunswick; New Jersey; London: Rutgers, 2001), pp. 37-71(p. 67).

the actress that had emerged as a result of the anxiety that she caused through her power to disrupt the public/private divide and the consequent questions that her high-profile role and economic independence raised surrounding constructs of gender and identity. As Kerry Powell has stated in *Women and the Victorian Theatre*, 'the idea of woman's free and flexible selfhood [...] contradicted Victorian thought about the self in general and woman's self in particular'. [8] As the title suggests, Powell's immediate subject is the London stage, but conceptions of celebrity were international in the Western world by this time and the philosophy of separate spheres was as ideologically dominant in Paris as it was in London. The visual codes that affiliated women and the entertainment industry intimated the process of mythologisation that shaped the attempt to represent and understand femininity at the *fin de siècle.*

Femininity and the urban myth

Concurrent with the development of the modern city and the new set of ways of looking at and understanding urban spaces, many attempts were made to control and interpret this chaotic environment. One aspect of this is revealed in the imagery that emerged from the modern metropolis, particularly in the phenomenon of the urban myth. The urban myth was central to constructions of gender in the late nineteenth-century and thus offers an interesting insight into the way that female bodies were classified and comprehended. As has already been suggested, the nineteenth-century woman formed one of the most characteristic social anxieties of the period. *Fin-de-*

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[8]Kerry Powell, *Women in the Victorian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997), p. 23.

siècle representations of femininity consistently reveal an almost primal fear of women, attributing them great levels of power. An exploration of the extreme images of women that occur within the field of mythical representation, as incarnations of good and evil, reveals that the dualities that pervaded social constructions of gender had a direct influence on the environment, presentation and promotion of the female performer.

The power of women as mythical figures within the new set of urban discourses is partially a result of the public/private divide discussed in chapter one. The ideological tension that was caused by the desire to define female sexuality in terms of the domestic environment was partly the result of the necessary involvement of women in the commercial activity of the city. As chapter one explored, the socio-economic survival of the metropolis depended upon the financial presence of both the female consumer and female workforce. An exploration of the figure of the female celebrity in nineteenth-century Paris demands a contextual analysis of her meaning within these new understandings of urban and domestic spaces that shaped the metropolis. [9]

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[9]In addition to this the figure of the prostitute, as the epitome of the intersection of femininity and commerce, is a familiar symbol from this period. Many influential individuals continued to believe (on both a personal and a legislative level) that the presence of the prostitute as a receptacle for men's urges was the safeguard for the continuation of marriage and the nuclear family as the status quo. Thus the female consumer and the prostitute (in her many incarnations from the brothel whore to the high-class courtesan) became significant iconic figures in modernity. James Tissot's ornate paintings and Toulouse-Lautrec's and Degas' brothel works are perhaps the most easily recognisable of their representations. These public women were tolerated, but the discomfort that their public presence evoked is clear from the measures that were taken to regulate and contain them, including the attempt to self-consciously fashion the city's major department stores to resemble domestic environments and the complex system of registration and compulsory medical inspection that essayed to regulate the metropolis's prostitution.

In her study of late nineteenth-century London, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, Judith Walkowitz has noted the centrality of women in public spaces to the *flâneur's* construction of the *fin-de-siècle* metropolis. 'In the mental map of urban spectators they [women] lacked autonomy: they were bearers of meaning, rather than makers of meaning. As symbols of conspicuous display or of lower-class and sexual disorder, they occupied a multivalent symbolic position in this imaginary landscape.' [10] Walkowitz's statement emphasises the role of women on display in urban spaces and their position as mythic vessels that represented chaos and sexual threat. The popular stage was a forum that witnessed the continuation of these archaic myths of femininity whilst supplying an environment where these images could be appropriated and renegotiated by the female celebrity. The difference lies in the active body of the performer as a figure who made, rather than bore, meaning.

The role of femininity in *fin-de-siècle* Parisian mythical thought is indicative of the discourses of stillness and movement – passivity and activity - that dominated contemporary understandings of gender. Archetypal images of women acted as the extreme ideological representations of the ideal woman and the *femme fatale*, the late nineteenth-century's incarnation of the virgin/whore dichotomy that has shaped constructs of femininity throughout history. The formation of these fantastical images of perfection or dread arose partially in response to the real threats of the falling birth rate, the spread of sexually transmitted disease and the new importance

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[10]Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992), p. 21.

of the market economy. They were also rooted in the creator's own particular understanding of femininity, however, the result of a combination of personal experience and the cultural infiltration of social ideas. This binary pervaded society on all levels, from the writings on women in supposedly objective studies produced by Paris's scientific community to the fantasies of the *femme fatale*, prolific in art, literature and the mass press.

The *fin de siècle* witnessed the rapid growth of scientific principle as the basis of society. The resulting atheism was counterbalanced by a resurgence of interest in myth and a corresponding fascination with ritual and alternative understandings of spiritualism to the established Catholic Church. The cultural infiltration of other systems of thought and lifestyles, made possible by travel and by the colonial displays at the city's exhibitions was also a contributing factor. This interest in ritual ranged from the rise of symbolism, with its focus on myth and sensory synthesis, to widespread fascination with the occult. It is also possible to trace this new non-empiric way of thinking within the creation of the social myths that emerged in the city. Myths created a new set of moral laws to replace the dictates of religion that were gradually losing their power to control the population. Urban mythology filled the collective void that had been left by the individual rationality of science. The urban myth acted as a means of control and social power, increased by its position as the combined result of the ideas of authority and of everyday people. In the resurgence of myth, ideas that could not be rationalised away necessarily co-existed with the pragmatism of new scientific thought.

Mythology raises automatic associations with ancient civilisations and cultures, such as those of Greece and Rome, or with religious narratives, yet mythic thinking is present within every society at every time. Modernity offers a new phase of myth-making through the urban myth. In turn the urban myth's dynamic interrelationships with the mass audience and with the technologies of advertisement means that it embraced female narratives of popular performance. If modernity's characteristic anxieties were the result of scientific discoveries and the discourses of rationality, then the role of myth as a vehicle for the exploration of identity and meaning causes a logical and illuminating relationship between the two. In nineteenth-century mythical thought, archaic images and narratives were appropriated and interwoven with new ideas and symbols in an attempt to express contemporary anxieties. It is this appropriation of mythology – when its source is linked to the technologies and social structures of the modern metropolis – that constitutes the urban myth.

The social pervasiveness of the myth during the period is reflected in its important role in avant-garde experimental performance. Christopher Innes has noted that one defining factor of the avant-garde's many 'isms' has been:

> not overtly modern qualities [...] but primitivism. This has two complementary facets: the exploration of dream states or the instinctive and subconscious levels of the psyche; and the quasi-religious focus on myth and magic, which in the theatre leads to experiments with ritual and the ritualistic patterning of performance. These are integrated not only by the Jungian concept that all figures of myth are contained in the unconscious as expressions of psychological archetypes, but also by the idea that symbolic or mythopoeic thinking precedes language and discursive reason, revealing fundamental aspects of reality that are unknowable by any other means. Both are variations

> of the same aim: to return to man's 'roots' [...] In theatrical terms this is reflected by a reversion to 'original' forms [...] the hallmark of avant garde drama is an aspiration to transcendence [...] [11]

The avant-garde interest in mysticism and psychology made it a natural arena for the inclusion of myth, but not all of the images and themes that the movements used were archaic, many indeed reflected the modern city. Maurice Donnay's episodic play *Ailleurs* (first performed in 1891 at the shadow theatre of *le chat noir*) exemplifies this appropriation of myth by avant-garde movements. Donnay divides the play between the historical world of the Greek myths and scenes from urban Paris that include the Institute and the stock exchange.

In addition to the themes and anxieties of modernity that were inherent in the urban myth, it was also affiliated with the developing metropolis through its dependence on a collective audience. The rapid increase in literacy rates during the nineteenth century and the development of cheaper and more efficient printing techniques resulted in a greater proportion of society having access to the images and ideas that were expressed in the press and in literature. This suggests an important shift in the concept of collectivity during the period that is an intrinsic part of the democratisation of culture specific to the *fin de siècle* entertainment industry.

There is an automatic tension between feminist social perspectives and nineteenth-century mythical thought, which is seemingly rooted in the assumption that myth can be interpreted solely as a means of transmission for patriarchal thought.

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[11]Christopher Innes, *Avant-Garde Theatre, 1892-1992* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.

Although it is true that many of the *fin-de-siècle* mythological representations of women reveal a, generally male, anxiety about the socio–economic role of women, it is harmfully reductive to simply dismiss these images, or to investigate them from a position that presupposes that all myth is dangerous propaganda. As has been established, myths are created through a process of shared narrative. Studies of cultures have suggested that it is women who have traditionally fulfilled the role of the storyteller, transmitting oral narratives down through generations and thus offering a sense of cultural continuity. The nature of mythical dissemination may have been altered by the modern technologies of the industrial world, yet women still held an important role in the creation and transmission of nineteenth-century myth, as well as acting as emblematic representations of it. Many of the representations of femininity in these images and narratives were adapted from ancient cultures and religious iconography, but their new incarnations reveal how women began to appropriate myth as early as the *fin de siècle,* using it as both a form of resistance and a source of creativity.

Estella Lauter offers a useful model for the way in which a myth is established within a culture in, *Women as Mythmakers: Poetry and Visual Art by Twentieth-Century Women.*[12] Lauter reads the genesis of a particular myth in the occurrence of the recurrent mental image that forms the general response to a repeated human experience, she labels this image an 'archetype'. The manifestation of this dominant idea in narratives or art, she labels an 'archetypal image'. If these images are

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[12]Estella Lauter, *Women as Mythmakers: Poetry and Visual Art by Twentieth-Century Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1984), p. 4.

powerful enough, a qualifier that automatically suggests that the experience that they represent must possess a degree of universality in a shared language, then they will be widely disseminated through cultural rituals and narratives. It is through this process and the resulting recognition of and identification with the image that the archetypal image becomes myth.

Lauter develops her argument further to explore the cultural inheritance of myth, usefully pointing out that its vessels – the images and narratives by which it is transmitted – frequently live on as symbols in language long after they have stopped expressing the primary human experience that propagated them. Although Lauter's argument is concerned with the feminist project to consciously rework myth, this conclusion suggests that inherited symbols, the archetypal images of the past, can be appropriated by any shared culture in order to symbolise its anxieties. In this way the urban mythological representations of women that are discussed in this chapter are a complex combination of archaic ideas and images of femininity, as well as modern anxieties.

If, following Lauter, the nexus of mythology is understood as being rooted in the repetition of a shared representational narrative or image, then modernity's technological developments offered a unique new means of making myth through mass reproduction. Modernity allowed an unprecedented dissemination of images and narratives, through the new mediums of the *faits divers* columns in the daily press, cheap, easily available fiction and the mass-produced caricature. These both

established new mythical images and ideas more quickly and fuelled those that were already in existence. On a second level the urban myth is also characterised by its new and more dynamic relationship with its means of dissemination, for a great deal of the anxieties that were contained within these repeated images were rooted in, or related to, the technology that was responsible for their rapid propagation.

The urban myth and the female performer

An investigation of the relationship between the urban myth and the female performer is complicated by the ambiguous position that she occupied within *fin-de-siècle* society. The technological developments that fostered the arena of mass culture and made the female celebrity a recognisable social category, through the printing, merchandise and advertisement of the new marketing industry, occurred so quickly that the figure seems to almost have come out of nowhere. For this reason it is difficult to find a cultural reference point that enables the female celebrity to be located within a socio-historical sequence of ideological and imagistic ideas surrounding women in the nineteenth century. The elements that distinguish the female performer from typical representations of femininity during the period are her activity, including the necessary focus on her embodiment and her physical strength, and the way that she has been sited as a figure that emerged rapidly out of the ephemerality and technology of modernity.

The ideological opposite of the activity that represented the female performer on the *fin-de-siècle* popular stage can be discovered in the nineteenth-century ideal of the dutiful woman, encapsulated in the social image of the domestic serenity of the home. The result of this binary – and the threat to the ideology of the passive 'Angel of the House' which the activity of the performer embodied – was that sexuality began to be associated with the female body that was actively involved in the world. The 'Angel of the House', therefore, became more closely associated with the myth of frailty, a significant influence on ideas surrounding femininity during the period. Unsurprisingly, this myth also focused on the body, but in this case on its disempowerment through physical weakness and recurrent periods of sickness. As Lynda Nead has explored, a lack of motion became symbolic of the passivity understood to be an ideal feminine quality:

> Female dependency was reproduced and guaranteed by the belief that respectable women were inherently weak and delicate, and were in a perpetual state of sickness [...] physical frailty was a sign of respectable femininity and by the mid nineteenth century a morbid cult of 'female invalidism' had developed. [13]

Studies of the representation of 'ideal femininity' at the *fin de siècle*, in particular Bram Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*, have focused on this belief that physical stillness was a desirable quality in a woman. Dijkstra locates the extreme point of this image in the cults of the invalid and the collapsing woman within nineteenth-century visual art, where paintings conveyed the idea that, 'the very effort of living seemed to exhaust [the women

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[13]Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1988), p. 29.

portrayed]'. [14] Nineteenth-century Paris offers a fascinating insight into the image of the female passive body in the entrance of the city's morgue into the arena of mass culture.

The developing fixation with the spectacular in everyday life identified in chapter one became a 'love of looking' that soon turned to the grotesque in its continual search to fulfil an increasing need for visual stimulation. This is evinced in the contemporary fascination that was evoked by the unknown bodies that were displayed to the public at the new Paris morgue, which opened in 1864. Public access to the morgue was initiated in the hope that spectators might be able to identify a proportion of the bodies housed there; the morgue was open from morning to night and admission was free as a result of this social purpose. [15] Instead of the fulfilment of any sense of duty, however, a visit to the morgue soon became viewed as a social excursion. As Vanessa Schwartz has commented:

> The morgue administration may have needed people to come and see the bodies in order to identify them, but could it possibly have needed hundreds of thousands of people? While the display's defenders claimed that the spectacle existed in the name of science, the public knew what the morgue administration would not admit: they offered the best free theatre in town. [16]

The bodies that were displayed in the morgue were placed behind large plate glass windows, with huge curtains that were drawn across when the cadavers were changed. It seems that this fascination can be at least partially attributed to the

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[14]Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University, 1986), p. 70.
[15]Anon., *Cassell's Guide to Paris and the Universal Exhibition of 1900* (London: Cassell and Company, 1900), p. 125.
[16]Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Beerkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California, 1998), p. 59.

erotic; the dead were displayed near naked, with their clothes suspended on a hook above them in case they helped the identification process (clearly this would not be the case if they were actually wearing them!). The self-conscious theatricality of this manner of display is clear, with the bodies framed within a scene that closely resembled the, by now conventional, proscenium arch of mainstream theatres. This theatricality is even more telling when one considers that the building had recently been purpose-built, funded by the municipal authorities; spectacle in Paris had become an accepted, and it seems endorsed, way of life. The morgue was even marketed to tourists, with its inclusion in city guides and with postcards being produced of the building and of the most famous of its inhabitants – mainly victims of unsolved crime.

The fascination with the Paris morgue reveals a network of contemporary ideas that surrounded femininity, spectacle, science and social conditions, including concepts of passivity, display, classification and fascination with crime and suicide. The entry on the morgue that was included in the 1900 edition of the guidebook, *An American Tourist in France,* suggests the tensions that were evoked by the complexity of ideas involved in the morgue when it reports that the building, 'was built to receive the unknown dead, picked up in the street or fished up from the river; placed in a room of exceedingly low temperature, these bodies are exhibited behind large panes of glass' and then notes that, 'no special permit is required to view the gruesome (labelled) exhibits'. [17] This short passage is an intriguing combination of specifically modern discursive practices that reveals that even this most explicitly

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[17]Anon., *The American Tourist in France* (Philadelphia: Tourist Publishing Company, 1900), p. 78.

voyeuristic of Parisian sites was the strange and historically unique result of a quintessentially *fin-de-siècle* mixture of gazes. To return to Schwartz, the people who visited the morgue, 'read as though they were a catalog of Parisian social types. The accounts, whether written by natives or foreigners, seemed to invoke the diverse crowd as somehow typifying the city'. [18] From contemporary reports it is also clear that women visited the morgue in single-sex groups and took children to view the corpses. The result of this is that through the pervasive presence of spectacle a cross-section of society had access to the physical realities of dead, semi-naked bodies.

Contemporary English guidebooks to Paris supply further enlightenment on the experience of the morgue. It is clear that the editor of the 1900 edition of the *Baedeker* guide to the city would like to think, or perhaps more accurately thinks that the reader would like him to think, that the average middle-class British tourist would be above such voyeuristic tendencies. The guide's entry on the morgue is again clothed in objective, scientific terminology, yet it still makes sure that it points out its location and opening hours:

> At the South East end of the *Ile de la Cité* [...] stands the Morgue (open daily), a small building re-erected in 1864, where the bodies of unknown persons who have perished in the river or otherwise are exposed to view. They are placed on marble slabs, kept cool by a constant flow of water [...] The process of refrigeration to which the bodies are subjected makes it possible to keep them here, if necessary, for three months. [...] The painful scene attracts many spectators, chiefly of the lower orders. [19]

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[18]Schwartz, p. 64.
[19]Karl Baedeker, *Paris and Environs: Handbook for Travellers* (Leipsec: Karl Baedeker, 1900), p. 227.

The inclusion of this information appears to legitimate Urry's concept of the tourist gaze, that there was a certain relaxation of conventional behavioural expectations when the spectator was removed from her/his normal environment. The experience of visiting the morgue, and its accepted status as a tourist attraction – revealed by its inclusion in the guide – is veiled in the language of science, the rational approved discourse of the nineteenth century.

The bodies that drew the biggest crowds into the morgue were, perhaps unsurprisingly, those of women; closely followed by those of young children. Murder victims also proved extremely popular attractions. This interest in dead, female bodies reflects the contemporary gender constructions that can be traced in the binary opposition of activity and passivity. Elisabeth Bronfen's study, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic,* explores representations of the female dead body alongside understandings of gender and concludes that death necessarily engages with questions that encompass the locus and distribution of social power. Bronfen argues that the way in which female dead bodies are represented in culture depends upon who is in power at the time and the means by which that power is transmitted. [20] When this system of thought is applied to the *fin-de-siècle* female dead corpse it is possible to trace the fear of female sexuality in the growing discourses surrounding heredity and degradation that resulted in a generally animalistic and diseased view of the female body. This is illustrated in the recurrent images that associate women and the living dead as vampiric figures. The female

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[20]Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1992), p. 22..

vampire exists in the space between the two extremes of life and death; she avoids classification within a scientific culture. The desire for a passive, definable female embodied state is strengthened through these examples of fear.

The fear that is evident in representations of death culminates in the figure of the *femme fatale*, a key image in the urban mythology of the late nineteenth century and one that is central to representations and interpretations of the female performer. In a society that was still reverberating from the shock of Darwinian theory, security was sought in scientific and social categorisation, but female sexuality was perceived as evading definition. As a result of this, female sexuality evoked the fear of the uncontrollable elements of the modern world, the dark side of the central duality that Bermann identified. The *femme fatale* had the power to slide between classes, worlds (in repeated images of exoticism and mysticism) and held the ability to shift male consciousness from reason to the irrationality of desire. The iconography of the *femme fatale* did draw on ancient sources, in particular the Bible for appropriations of Salomé, but the final representations of her were quintessentially modern. Understandings of the female celebrity are rooted in this fear of the corporeality of women, celebrated by performance.

What the morgue legitimated was the display of the female body in its most passive, objectified state and the right to look at her as a social duty. As a corpse, the female body is wholly corporeal; there is no question of an enduring subjectivity. This is particularly true when the body has no identity, the anonymous figure in the morgue

was devoid of a life in human terms, no one had any knowledge of her previous existence. In this way these bodies were as close to pure corporeality as it was possible to get. Any fear of living female sexuality is eradicated by the very real, physical death in front of the spectator. In the morgue, it was possible to securely and biologically categorise the physical qualities of woman, although this is not to claim that there was no sense of eroticism involved. It is the force that moves woman – her sexuality - that is considered dangerous, not her physical form. The female celebrity – and in particular the dancer – fulfils the extreme of this spontaneous, uncontrollably active woman and thus forms the antithesis of this controlled categorised woman.

The relationship between death and the ways in which it has been represented at specific historical moments supplies an interesting convergence between mass culture and the urban myth. The bodies in the morgue frequently became a subject of the popular press and they were also frequently photographed and mass reproduced on postcards. Through these quintessentially modern technologies of reproduction, communication and display, the anonymous dead women of the Paris morgue became short-lived celebrities. These images, and the associated networks of power, locate death – in the ultimately passive female body – within the world of mass culture.

'La France'

The sense of national anxiety that characterised France after its successive revolutions left the country's leaders searching for a symbolic manifestation of unity that would capture the public imagination. As Ian Jeffrey states, France was looking, '[...] for a sign sufficiently powerful to maintain itself in a secular and utopian age and found it in the image of a beloved woman'. [21] These representations of *'La France'*, the embodiment of the country's values in the female form, remain present across Paris in visual art and in sculptural works. In her study of the allegorical meanings of the female body throughout Europe, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form,* Marina Warner has commented that the unique quality of sculpture that has been integrated into metropolitan design is that nobody really notices it unless it is removed. It is only when the object is no longer there that one becomes aware of its absence. [22] This is an interesting idea when considered alongside ideas of femininity, for in a similar way, these mythical incarnations of Woman have been absorbed into overall conceptions of French culture.

The most famous incarnation of 'La France' is the Amazonian figure widely known as Marianne. This label only became widespread in the middle of the nineteenth century, although its roots were in the name of a secret society during the 1789

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[21]Ian Jeffrey, intro., South Bank Centre, *La France: Images of Woman and Ideas of Nation, 1789-1989* (London: South Bank Centre, 1989), p. 19.
[22]Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 2.

revolution. [23] The symbolic power of nineteenth-century incarnations of the figure of Marianne was undeniably rooted in her femininity, but this does not mean that she was a one-dimensional image of the ideal woman. Instead, Marianne existed at the centre of a complicated set of discourses that reveal the problematic location of woman at the time. For example, she is often located within images of battles, visual narratives that were preoccupied with the nineteenth-century desire to represent France through the masculine codes of militarism as a virile and conquering nation. Yet, in spite of the violence of these locations, Marianne's active presence is – by the very nature of visual art – always frozen in time: she cannot take part in the scene portrayed. This is a peculiar combination of the passive and the active that may explain the conflicting responses to her image, for it seems that no female figure was entirely immune from the dichotomous approaches to femininity that shaped contemporary society, even the national figurehead of Marianne, 'for some Marianne is a saint or a new goddess but for others she is the 'trollop', France herself is seen either as a princess or a wicked stepmother'. [24]

There is one figure that exists between these two extreme images of femininity and reveals that at the conceptual point where two *fin-de-siècle* binaries intersected a moment of agency existed. The *pétroleuse* emerged as the key iconic figure of the Paris commune of 1871, as the familiar term adopted for the female members of the

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[23]After an extended attempt to theorise the origins of Marianne's name, Maurice Alguhon notes that the republican journalist André Guérin concedes that the most likely reason behind the choice of her name is simply that Marie-Anne was a common first name in the late eighteenth century and that the early republicans selected it as a way to endorse their belief that they were a popular movement. Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880,* trans. by Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981), p. 10.
[24]Agulhon, p. 3.

revolutionaries. [25] The *pétroleuse,* like the female celebrity, was the direct result of her historical and cultural moment. Existing images of the *pétroleuses* reveal their appropriation of the imagery associated with the figure of Marianne. The *pétroleuses* seem to have self-consciously appropriated this mythical image of femininity in their dress and in their behaviour. An exploration of this figure establishes how nineteenth-century women could adopt certain elements of current urban myths in order to subvert and to question contemporary ideal constructs of femininity. The response to the figure of the *pétroleuse* also allows access to the cultural anxieties that surrounded the active woman. In the story of her brief domination of the Parisian press and metropolitan gossip, the *pétroleuse* emerges as a precursor – a mythic vessel – for later understandings of the female celebrity.

> The French government are *capable de tout* (capable of anything).
> They really believe in the truth of the wild petroleum fables –
> the coinage of their own distempered brains. They do think the
> women of Paris are "neither brute nor human, neither man nor woman"
> – but "petroleum" – a species of salamander, delighting in their
> native element – fire. [26]

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[25]The Paris commune was a direct result of the Franco-Prussian War and the siege of the capital by Bismarck's troops, and an indirect result of lingering disgust at the decadence of the Second Empire and of the resentment at the way that the newly formed assembly had treated Parisians after the peace treaty had been signed. The war indemnity demanded by the Prussians was immense, and the Assembly was eager to impress Bismarck, in order to minimise the occupation of France by Prussian troops. Their harsh strategy to meet this financial demand was considered particularly extreme by the citizens of Paris who had not yet recovered from the pecuniary upheaval of both the war and the siege. This tension was exacerbated by the Assembly's very public distrust of the people of Paris, which resulted in a shift of rule to Versailles and in the army being ordered to disarm the capital's national guard. This last action was catalytic, when government troops entered the Montmartre area of the city riots ensued and members of the mob murdered the generals in command of the mission. In response, the Assembly ordered all of their troops out of Paris, to return en masse and take the capital by force. Consequently, the actions of the crowd gave the Assembly the opportunity to do exactly what it had been waiting for, to make a very public display of its refusal to tolerate any form of revolutionary activity and, simultaneously, to identify and rid itself of the individuals whom they considered to be potential revolutionary ringleaders. The fight to regain Paris, however, took a lot longer than many people imagined. A realistic estimate suggests that 25 000 revolutionaries were killed, most of them in the final days of the commune.

[26]Jenny Marx, *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly,* 23 September, 1871, p. 6.
As the daughter of Karl Marx, already famous as the leader of the greatly feared socialist movement, it is evident why the authorities considered Jenny Marx's extended stay in France to be a potential threat. Her visit, however, was restricted to a spa town at the foot of the Pyrenees, she ventured nowhere near the capital and her arrest is a major indication of the paranoia that motivated a substantial amount of the Republic's actions.

The unique position of the *pétroleuse* was the result of her complete isolation, both historically and culturally. During the period of the commune the government used the image of the *pétroleuse* as the representative figure of anarchy and chaos. The Paris commune was so brief that there was no time to construct regulated definitions of the women who were involved. Although it was evident that the *communarde* defied the accepted terms that were in use to classify women, there was no replacement classification system immediately available. In addition to this, as a historical moment, the Paris commune offered a sense of relative liberation, where existing social values and structures could be questioned. The *pétroleuse* as a model of femininity acts as the epitome of the latent fear of the darker side of uncontrollable modernity that, 'threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are'; seizing the public spaces of the city and controlling them. [27] The terror of the uncontrollable revolutionary mob was literally represented in the most irrational and chaotic of human symbols, the woman. The Paris commune questions the recurrent image of Paris as a bohemian utopia in nineteenth-century art and literature, it appears to have been a momentary outburst of all that Paris wanted to deny existed, and the figurative representation utilised by the anti-*communards* to epitomise this anarchy and revolution was significantly female.

After two months of governing the besieged city the last days of the commune were a time of desperation and mass slaughter that have been retrospectively identified as *la semaine sanglante*. The majority of the tales that survive from the commune originate from this short intense period, including the myth of the *pétroleuse*. It was

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[27]Marshall Bermann, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (London: Verso, 1983), 15.

during the final days of the commune that a group of *citoyennes* burned down many of the public buildings of the city that they had failed to liberate. The structures that were destroyed were those that resonated with metaphorical power, notably the Palace of Justice and the Prefecture of Police. These women rapidly achieved legendary status as the epitome of 'anti-France' figures and they were immortalised through contemporary newspaper accounts, narratives and drawings. The reality of the situation, however, was rather different; as a contemporary account by Vizetelly makes clear, the *pétroleuse* as she has been represented and handed down through history is actually no more than a mythological construct:

> [...] in most instances, the women who helped set fire to the public buildings of Paris did so acting under the direct instructions of men. Here and there some *crazy creature* may have tried, on her own initiative, to set one or another house on fire with the help of a canful of petroleum. But the tales of hundreds of women wandering around with their little supplies of mineral oil, and setting fire to one another [sic] place in a haphazard way, are gross exaggerations, and in many instances absolutely untrue. The idea of the wandering *pétroleuse*s appealed, however to imaginative journalists, and a whole crop of legends sprang up with respect to her. [28] (my emphasis)

The deconstruction of this iconographic nineteenth-century female figure through the realisation that she simply did not exist in these terms, raises numerous questions surrounding her creation that encompass the meaning of the mythological image in late nineteenth-century France and the instrumental role of gender and sexuality within that imagery. The figure of the *pétroleuse* reveals two essential ideas concerning the construction of femininity: the fascination that the figure held for the press displayed through the ways that she was represented and the way that her presence as a public figure affected contemporary women.

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[28]Vizetelly, Ernest Alfred, *My Adventures in the Commune* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1914), p. 325.

The public fascination that was generated by images of the *pétroleuses* in the immediate aftermath of the commune depreciates the varied and necessary roles women fulfilled in the revolutionary activity of 1871. Contemporary and historical responses to the *citoyennes* have been shaped by the mythological notion that active female involvement occurred only when the situation of the commune became desperate, and that the actions of these women were wholly irrational. This detracts from the important role that they played throughout the commune, where they were integral ideological and physical forces from its very inception, believing that the creation of a new socialist society would also provide an opportunity to actively rework the gender definitions of the time. This is not to claim that the commune was a nurturing environment for female solidarity – the leaders of the commune were, in general, as misogynistic as the exiled government:

> Les officiers de la commune, autant que ceux de l'armée régulière, se méfiaient de ces femmes que l'on voyait sur les champs de bataille, au lieu de rester à la cuisine. La mysogynie est un vieux réflexe, quasi biologique. [29]
>
> (The officers of the commune, like those in the regular army, did not have confidence in the women that they saw on the battlefields, in place of staying in the kitchen. Misogyny was an old, almost biological, reflex.)

However, the relative disorganisation of the commune and its campaign for total equality did allow women to occupy new, if temporary, social and political spaces.

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[29]Edith Thomas, *Louise Michel ou la Velléde de l'Anarchie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 95.

During the commune women ran societies for the defence of Paris, organised and spoke at women's meetings throughout the city, fought on the barricades and became members of the commune's naval forces, concerned with the defence of the river Seine. Alongside this they fulfilled more traditional nurturing roles as nurses and ambulance drivers. In this way they were placed in a uniquely paradoxical position with many dividing their time between killing and saving lives. Women of the commune were valuable as both fighters and carers during its short existence, as Edith Thomas states in her biography of Louise Michel, one of the most famous of the *citoyennes,* 'she fought, she shot and she killed. And at the same time she collected the injured and the dead'. [30] The *citoyennes'* primary concern was the abolishment of any form of inequality within Parisian society. This vision of socio-politically aware and motivated women entering public spaces and adopting political rhetoric was the key source of the anti-commune sense of terror that was captured in the figure of the *pétroleuse.* Gender was not, however, their sole issue and evidence suggests that they never directly campaigned for emancipation; instead they saw the opportunity to change gender roles at the more fundamental level of education. It may be for this reason that they have not received the attention from feminist circles that may have been expected, but the actions of the female *communards* and their self-conscious construction of a very public image and lifestyle make them valuable predecessors for the women of the *fin de siècle.*

In their account of the role that women played in the Paris commune of 1871, Kathleen Jones and Françoise Vèrges identify the immediate predecessor of the

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[30]Thomas, p. 95.

citoyenne as the Second Empire courtesan, an image they see as encapsulated in Emile Zola's *Nana*:

> From these groups of women came the *Communardes*: actors self-consciously transforming the public sphere with an élan that breeches the gender boundaries of political space. Neither passive nor victimised, these women speak, act, refashion their bodies and gestures ...[31]

This is interesting because, as chapter three will explore, the courtesan can also be traced as an important figure in the development of the female celebrity. In a similar way the *communarde* offered a powerful image of a woman who rejected the gender values prescribed for her and demanded freedom and an equal society. Her influence on women in late nineteenth-century Paris, and particularly on those who were also considered to be outside of conventional sexual spheres, cannot be underestimated.

Part of the link that Jones and Vèrges perceive between the women of the commune and the courtesan is the extreme awareness of their image as an empowering tool that they shared. This applies both to their rejection of the costume of society and to their visible reconstruction of themselves as examples of a new definition of woman:

> They thronged the streets, brandishing red flags, wearing men's clothes and repudiating the norms of fashion of the day. They intended to be seen as they saw themselves, not according to the tastes and desires of others. [32]

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[31]Kathleen Jones and Francoise Vergès, '"Aux Citoyennes!": Women, Politics and the Paris Commune of 1871', *History of European Ideas*, 13:6 (1991), 711-32 (p. 711).
[32]Jones and Vergès, p. 728.

This focus on the body, and the adoption of social and gender-based ideas in order to reject them is significant. It draws upon the urban mythology of femininity and it is important, therefore, to look further at the role of image and costume, where once again it can be seen that ideas surrounding fashion offered more than mere compliance with patriarchal concepts of sexuality and appearance.

The dress of the Second Empire had been designed to enhance the eroticism of the female body and it reflected current ideas surrounding femininity. Crinolines allowed regular glimpses of ankle and leg when the wearer moved, whilst the distance between individuals enforced by the sheer width of the skirts retained the idea of the mystic allure of female sexuality. In contrast to the constricting nature of this dress, both in terms of the corseting underneath it and in the care that had to be taken when moving in order to maintain modesty, both of which enforced passivity in its wearer, the *communardes* were primarily concerned with the utility of their dress. Their clothing had to allow freedom of movement. The adoption of male dress by women destabilised gender boundaries that had been partially regulated through costume and that were deemed essential to social stability: these values were further rocked by the sight of women carrying arms. That these weapons were not carried as a fashion accessory that symbolised sexual rebellion, or because these women's minds had been deluded by the socialist promises of the commune, but that there was a general feeling of conviction that they would have freely used them, appears to have concerned people more deeply:

> [...] I saw one of these Amazons with a rifle slung over her shoulder in as business-like a way as if she had carried it for years. [...] this woman was in ordinary female dress, and had probably taken up the rifle not so much for show as because she really meant to use it. [33]

There is a clear underlying eroticism in the male fascination with the *citoyenne,* most obviously revealed in the sheer amount of column space that was devoted to recurring descriptions of her. The effort put into her transformation into her mythical incarnation as the *pétroleuse* is an attempt to eradicate any element of this latent sexuality. By emphasising the brutal and animalistic drive behind her activities the caricature artist aims to annihilate any recognisable human appeal. In this way the convicted female members of the commune became part of the society of spectacle that they had inadvertently helped to create.

Spectacle was one of the most interesting weapons that was used by the *communards*. During the period of the commune the streets of Paris became a theatre in their own right, the citizens were fascinated by the developments and the realities of the conflict that provided their daily entertainment. Crowds would assemble around the cannons as they were fired on the Versaillais who surrounded the city walls. The enigma of the *pétroleuse* must be located within this environment that was wholly preoccupied with appearance and the power of the visual. Emblematic iconography is crucial to any understanding of spectacle and the actions of the *communards* of 1871 reveal the extent to which they recognised its power. This is illustrated by the destruction of many of Paris's monuments by the

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[33] *The Times,* 25 May 1871, p. 9.

communards and through the documentation of the conflict by artists from both sides. [34]

Caricature: The Pre-cursor of the Language of the Lithograph?

In addition to the destruction of existing socio-political imagery, the period of the commune produced a wealth of caricatures by artists from both sides of the debate. The nature of political caricature is interactive, taking immediate events as its source and responding directly to the contemporary public consciousness at all levels of society. The effectiveness of a caricature depends upon the simplicity and accuracy of its representations, which need to revolve around a common set of shared symbols. These works were propagandist material, and for them to fulfil this primary aim the viewer had to be able to recognise their human or social subject immediately. This was a concept - and a dependence on an audience - that would be developed through the lithograph and through the commercial world of advertising and thus had a direct influence on the representation and understanding of the female performer.

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[34]The destruction of the metaphorical monuments of the old regime was not undertaken swiftly and quietly, instead the commune authorities turned these acts into public, propagandist events. This is encapsulated in the destruction of the *colonne de Vendôme,* a monument that was dedicated to the victory of Napoleon at the Battle of Austerlitz. The demolition of the symbolic monument acted as a symbolic rejection of all that empire stood for. The need to destroy the monument and the extensive planning that took place before the event reveals the theatrical nature of the commune itself. The leaders of the commune took an act that they deemed to be necessary and turned its execution into a spectacular public event. In this way this symbolic rejection of France's immediate history was actively moved into the public discourse, through a month long period of publicity before the final event. Accounts of the column's destruction on May 16, 1871 report a carnival like atmosphere. The Place Vendôme was fenced off to the majority of the citizens of Paris, who had to watch from the surrounding roads, but members of the commune were issued with tickets to get them into the square close to the action. Brass bands were positioned at each corner of the square and entertained the crowds with regular performances of the *Marseillaise* and other popular French *chansons.* Technical hitches meant that the felling of the column actually took the whole afternoon, yet however unplanned this delay may have been, the event had been so well arranged that it actually only added to the atmosphere of anticipatory tension. When it finally fell, its place was immediately filled with four red flags, leaving the spectators with a new image in their minds, one that fulfilled the objectives of the commune.

The connection between the caricature and the urban myth is rooted in this collective language; in the works from the commune the *pétroleuse* rapidly became an 'archetypal image' through the mass of images distributed in a short period of time. The direct link between the caricature and contemporary ideas, combined with its power to communicate this to the lower classes of the city through a form that did not rely upon literacy, made the genre appear threatening. These prints offer a unique discourse surrounding the events of 1871 and in this way they are invaluable as a tool for investigating both the figure of the *pétroleuse* and the role of public art in nineteenth-century Paris.

Nineteenth-century caricatures were subject to a more stringent level of censorship than the written word: any image had to be approved by a committee of censors before it could be printed. The primary aim of this process was to keep the social comment generally inherent in caricature out of the sight of the lower-class masses. The element of the crowd, with its corresponding fear of mob violence, will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, but it is important to note that it was an intrinsic component in the contemporary anxieties surrounding the power of the visual image. Authoritative figures believed that the lower orders were particularly vulnerable to the political and social suggestion contained within caricature, for as a contemporary writer, Emile Villiers, explained:

> a drawing strikes the sight of the passerby, addresses itself
> to all ages and both sexes, startles not only the mind but
> the eyes. It is a means of speaking even to the illiterate,
> of stirring up passions, without reasoning, without discourse.[35]

This complaint against the public drawing is preceded by a contrasting description of the 'newspaper reader' who can view caricatures safely, a figure who is defined unmistakably as male and middle-class. The implication of this symbolic embodiment of intelligence and rationality in the newspaper reader is that his opposite would be female and lower class. The potential danger that nineteenth-century social commentators perceived in the crowd was increased as a result of the inclusion of the iconic figure of irrationality, the woman, an anxiety that is revealed in Villiers's specific reference to the presence of both sexes in the image's spectatorship.

During the period of the commune caricatures were printed, in large batches, on single sheets of paper. [36] The increasing competition that was a result of this change in the nature of the caricature meant that new levels of publicity were required to ensure that the genre remained commercially viable; the publication of new works became increasingly public events. New caricatures took central place in shop windows, were sold by street vendors and were pasted on the walls of the city. In this way, as well as documenting the social and political discourses of quotidian life, new caricatures by popular artists immediately became talking points as a result of

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[35]Emile Villiers, cited in Robert Justin Goldstein, ed., *Censorship of Political Caricature in Nineteenth-Century France* (Kent, Ohio; London: Kent State University, 1989), p. 4.
[36]The images were familiarly referred to as *feuilles volantes* 'flying sheets', which gives an idea of their number.

the interest that their unveiling attracted. James Leith comments that the revelation of a new caricature would attract crowds of people around it, joking or arguing about its theme. [37] This was exacerbated by the tendency of contemporary caricaturists to produce works serially; publishing their prints successively and thus making the audience anticipate the next instalment of the narrative being portrayed and await the artists' responses to current events. Illustrators were clearly influenced by the Parisian mass press's use of the serialisation of fiction to ensure a regular readership within an increasingly competitive industry.

One of the key symbols within the work of caricaturists from both sides of the commune was the female body. This is perhaps unsurprising, for, as Marina Warner states, in Paris, 'the female form was used for seven hundred years as the vehicle of shifting ulterior meanings more publicly and more frequently in Paris than in any other major city'. [38] The artists of 1871 adopted an inherited language of images that formed an integral part of French cultural and popular history, most clearly in their appropriation of the figure of Marianne. The mythological images of femininity created by the caricaturists could be collectively understood, for unlike many works of high art, these representations centred on a popular idiom. This dependence on a familiar, and rapidly comprehended, set of visual codes was necessitated by the competitiveness of the industry and by the need to attract the passing glance of the spectator. The most frequently used vehicle for the

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[37]James Leith, *Images of the Commune* (London; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University, 1978), p. 104.
[38]Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 22..

transmission of ideas was the female body, suggesting its key role as a signifier during the period.

Contemporary images reveal that the pro-commune caricaturists appropriated Amazonian female figures to validate and promote their social cause. The recurrent use of the warrior-maiden to symbolically represent the commune automatically evoked ideas of revolution through its resemblance to the figure of Marianne. In addition to this collective, inherited understanding of the meaning of the female form, the concept of a woman who has been driven to violence carried numerous other connotations in the nineteenth century. This is most clearly shown in ideas surrounding aesthetic ideals, such as justice and freedom, and their perceived link with femininity. The nineteenth-century female body was rich in emblematic meaning; as a moral symbol she represented the core ideals of humanity that she had no practical involvement in realising. The presence of these archetypal female figures in caricatures from the commune elicits a feeling of endorsement of the *communards*' struggle, a position that is strengthened by the transformation in the images of women that form the output of the last weeks of the commune, when the figure of the Amazon became a sacrificial body.

Leith draws attention to one crucial difference between the Amazonian figures of the 1871 commune and earlier examples of the symbolic use of women as representations of revolutionary ideology. He notes that the costume and appearance

of these later figures reflects that of women from the streets of Paris in the 1870s. [39] This location of the female figure within the immediate social sphere, where she is subject to the issues that motivated the *communards/des*, enhances the symbolic power of the cultural recognition that was latent in the figure of Marianne. These caricatures combine a sense of the contemporary with inherited mythical ideas and images surrounding revolutionary freedom and power and exemplify the process of appropriation that characterises the urban myth. This is an idea that is echoed in the entertainment lithograph's reflection of the popular culture industry, discussed in chapter three.

In contrast to the use of the female body to convey the moral validity of the *communards/des'* struggle, the anti-commune caricaturists invariably transformed the *citoyenne* into a grotesque and sub-human creature. The republican artists relied upon the inversion of the dominant contemporary ideas surrounding the social construction of femininity and the manipulation of the concept of woman as the nurturer of humanity. These are identical themes to those that the *communards* utilised as a means to justify their campaign, but employed to exploit the horror that, for a contemporary audience, was contained within these ideologically created symbols of peaceful maternity engaged in acts of violence. The *communards/des* considered use of the metaphorically loaded body of the female warrior as a vehicle to provoke sympathetic understanding for their cause was recognised by their opponents, who responded in their caricatures with an inverted image of femininity. The works of the anti-commune artists focus on stripping away the emotive power

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[39]Leith, p. 115.

of femininity. The caricaturists de-humanised the *Pétroleuse*, portraying her as an animalistic creature and thus destroying any sympathy that may be latent in her body. The work of the caricaturists displays how both sides of the commune recognised and harnessed the power of the collective image of the urban myth as an ideological tool. It reflects the use of public art as a vehicle to establish a unifying sense of French identity identified through Napoleon III's government proficient use of the power of art indicated in chapter one. The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the unprecedented employment of art and architecture to transform the meaning of public spaces, changing the urban landscape of the rapidly developing metropolis.

The historical inaccuracies that formed the representational core of the figure of the *Pétroleuse* did not effect belief in her at the time of the commune. Furthermore, the government of the Third Republic still considered the ideas and values that she symbolised to be a significant threat after they had regained control of Paris. Karl Marx famously identified the commune of 1871 as an important social experiment. For the *citoyennes* it offered an invaluable, if severely limited, opportunity to experiment with new ways of being seen in public. The rapid emergence of new social categories that the commune engendered allowed an amount of social and political activity: a domain that had before been classified as unsuitable for females. The anxiety that was caused by this is clear in the work of the anti commune caricaturists. The spectacle of the commune and the influence of political caricature on the poster art of the nineteenth-century made the *citoyenne* of the commune an

unlikely, but important, figure in the world of commodity culture and the iconography of the *fin-de-siècle* female celebrity.

The development of mythological representations of women in the modern metropolis is inseparable from the key contemporary understanding of the female body as spectacle. The female celebrity of the late nineteenth-century is, therefore, a figure born out of this complex set of discourses surrounding the passivity and activity of the female body and the opposition of licensed sexuality and dangerous transgressive femininity reflected in urban mythology and the iconography inscribed onto the embodied dangerous woman was the result of familiar images, such as those of the corpses of the morgue and the figures of Marianne and the *Pétroleuse*. The anxieties that are clearly raised by femininity and the urban myth revolve around the question of what happens when the female body – understood to be the locus of chaos and irrationality - moves freely and in perfect control? This threat to the dualistic ideological position of *fin-de-siècle* society can be addressed through the popular stage performers Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller, whose dependence on movement for the effects of their dancing is made clear in an article from 1893 concerning the problems faced by artists who attempted to represent Fuller's performance:

> Artists have attempted to reproduce the marvellous evolutions of *la danse serpentine* by pen, brush and pencil; but oddly enough, only the sculptor appears to have successfully transferred to plaster, brass or marble an idea of the airiness and witchery of Miss Fuller's drapery effects. [40]

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[40]'A Chat with Miss Loïe Fuller', *The Sketch* (12 April, 1893), pp. 642-3.

The next chapter explores the extent to which *fin-de-siècle* female celebrities self-consciously engaged with the contemporary discourses that attempted to categorise femininity and used the popular stage and the varied gazes of its audience as a liberating urban creative space.

Chapter Three: The Female Celebrity: Questioning the Boundaries of the *Fin-de-Siècle* Stage

> [The *Moulin Rouge*] glows like a furnace, and the glare from its lamps reddens the sky and lights up the surrounding streets and cafés and the faces of the people passing like a conflagration. The mill is red, the thatched roof is red, the arms are picked out in electric lights in red globes, and arches of red lamp-shades rise on every side against the blackness of the night. Young men and women are fed into the blazing doors of the mill nightly, and the great arms, as they turn unceasingly and noisily in a fiery circle through the air, seem to tell of the wheels within that are grinding out the life and the health and souls of these young people of Montmartre. [1]

This image of the *Moulin Rouge*, taken from the American journalist Richard Harding Davis's 1895 guide to Paris, offers an infernal vision of the dance hall, locating it at the heart of the physical and moral degeneration of Montmartre and the city of Paris. The production line of young men and women who were fed – or, perhaps more importantly, apparently willingly fed themselves – into this electrically lit, seductive machine acts as a symbolic representation of the perceived dangers of popular culture in the *fin-de-siècle* metropolis. Davis's choice of the image of the production line, an emblematic phenomenon in the factories that had emerged as a result of the developing industrialisation of the western world, reveals his location of the technologies of mass culture at the centre of the anxieties that were evoked by the burgeoning entertainment industry in Paris.

By extension it was also the entertainment and lifestyle that were represented by the city's most renowned *fin-de-siècle* dance hall that Davis was offering a warning against, yet simultaneous advertisement of, in his choice of language. The *Moulin Rouge* acted as a powerful signifier of a lifestyle of drink and

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[1]Richard Harding Davis, *About Paris*, (New York: Harper Bros, 1895), p. 95.

women, a representation of the dark and uncontrollable side of modernity that was inherently linked to the contemporary concerns that surrounded social disintegration and anarchy. The Cancan dancers – referred to by Davis as 'the wheels within', an allusion to the swirling skirts that characterised their performances - were blamed for, 'grinding out the life and the health and souls' of the younger generation of Montmartre. The *cancaneuses* became an iconic representation of the erotic and disrespectable nature of the *fin-de-siècle* popular stage, and simultaneously of its most renowned category, the female celebrity.

It is important to acknowledge that it was not solely the local population of the eighteenth *arrondissement* who frequented the *Moulin Rouge.* As Davis indicates through his inclusion of the dance hall in his Paris guide, it was also a hugely popular venue with the Parisian population in general as well as with the tourists who visited the city. What Davis's explicit reference to the 'young people of Montmartre' as the hall's audience reveals, however, is the tendency for accounts of the *Moulin Rouge* to be characterised by their ambiguity. In tourist literature this can generally be seen through an incongruous combination of a seemingly morally disapproving tone, coupled with full details of opening times and the hall's location (echoing the previous account of the Paris morgue). This offers an implicit level of advertisement that was the culmination of the inferential understanding of the venue as the erotic centre of Parisian nightlife. A British guidebook that was published to coincide with the 1900 exhibition reports that, '[the *Moulin Rouge*] is the place to dance or gaze at the whirl of the quadrilles which are danced in a manner that defies description. The old adage, "must be seen to be appreciated", holds good here more than ever.' The author

then moves on, in an idiosyncratically Victorian morally aware tone, to state that, '[o]f course, you who enter here leave your prudish scruples behind'. [2] The equivocal nature of these tourist guides reveals the temporary liberation that was offered by the tourist gaze discussed in chapter one and explored through the environment of the Paris morgue: the result of the spectator's location in another country, away from their habituated norm.

In addition to this, examples from tourist literature suggest that the late nineteenth-century arena of popular culture contained an inherent dualism of its own. The term mass culture is retrospectively employed to refer both to the physical spaces and material conditions of the entertainment industry and to a social construct that was intrinsically linked to modernity and the city. Through these multi-layered discourses Davis's description located the *Moulin Rouge* as both a venue in a specific geographical area of the city and as a site of degeneration. This reflects Bermann's identification of the central element of the experience of modernity as a simultaneously empowering and threatening force. The diversity of responses to and understandings of the area of popular culture indicates the complexity of the ideas and gazes that shaped its audience.

This chapter explores the emergence of the female celebrity of mass culture as a historically specific figure at the end of the nineteenth century. It engages with the negative image of her that has been received, both from contemporary responses and from present-day approaches to the popular stage, through an exploration of mass culture and its relationship with feminism and the avant-

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[2]Viscomte de Kératry, *Paris Exposition 1900: How to see Paris Alone* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1900), p. 161.

garde. This aim is problematised by the extant evidence of mass culture, which is mainly the product of the related industries of the mass press and advertisement. The tension between this existing imagery and the creative elements of female performance(s) will be discussed in relation to lithography and Loïe Fuller and Jane Avril. The main impediment to this project, however, is the result of the issues that were raised concerning the characteristic feminist discomfort with the reality of female embodiment. The late nineteenth-century popular culture industry revolved around the visual, so any consideration of the celebrity necessarily engages with the problematic ideas of the female body on display. Furthermore, responses to the female performer have been shaped by hierarchical approaches to the mass culture industry as 'Low' culture and its subsequent association with the feminine. With these two difficult areas in mind, it is useful to begin this chapter with a brief outline of approaches to the field of popular culture.

Mass culture: social disintegration or cultural democratisation?

The pervasive understanding of mass culture as a dangerous and degenerative force within the nineteenth-century metropolis is an intrinsic element of Richard Harding Davis's image of the *Moulin Rouge* that opened this chapter. It also highlights the social and political forces that shaped the majority of existing documentation surrounding the popular cultural venues in late nineteenth-century Paris. Davis worked primarily for the American journal, *Harpers Magazine,* itself a part of the popular press that relied on the *faits divers* of modern metropolises to fill its pages and to maintain its readership amidst the

competition of the rapidly developing media industry. This economic concern supplies one practical reason for the ambivalent relationship between danger and seduction that typifies travel guide writing of the period: journal editors needed to satisfy the public's demand for interesting, 'modern' material, whilst maintaining enough of a high moral tone to ensure that they did not alienate a significant proportion of their potential and existing readership.

The idea of mass culture as a 'symptom or a cause of social decay' dominated thought surrounding popular entertainment at the time and has remained central to the analysis of the area until the present day. [3] The result of this cultural judgment has been a restriction of the ways in which popular stage celebrities, and their contribution to the history of performance, have been understood. The *fin de siècle*, however, offers a slightly freer working environment: critical analysis of the Culture Industry was initiated primarily by the social philosophers of the Frankfurt School (whose members included Adorno and Horkheimer), and tended to locate the roots of mass culture as a negative social force during the early twentieth century. The Frankfurt School denounced the products of the mass culture industry as the opposite of 'true art': simplistic entertainment forms that resulted in a passive audience who felt no need to question or intellectually respond to the material that they viewed. As a result of this the Culture Industry was accused of organising responses to the commodities of the popular culture industry and developing a 'growing concordance between its products and everyday life'. [4] Adorno refuted any possibility of the leisure activities of mass culture offering a level of true escapism, stipulating that they merely act as a

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[3]Patrick Bratlinger, *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1983), p. 17.

[4]Shane Gunster, 'Revisiting the Culture Industry Thesis: Mass Culture and the Commodity Form', 40-70 (p. 43).

continuation of the everyday capitalist lifestyle that the spectator employs them to avoid. Adorno's concern is interesting and emphasises the Frankfurt School's concession: the late nineteenth-century mass cultural environment supplied a different example of the role and meaning of popular entertainment.

Fin-de-siècle popular culture can be seen to represent the foundations of the Culture Industry that was to dominate the twentieth-century world, prior to the formalisation of its values and ideas within western capitalist culture. Adorno's rejection of the potential for escapism is based upon the assumption that the spectators of mass culture wish to escape the quotidian, suggesting that its audience is comprised of a body of people who share a reasonably stable cultural experience, class and lifestyle. Across the numerous classes and nationalities that shaped the diverse audience of *fin-de-siècle* Paris it seems difficult to accept that the situation was that simple. The newness of the entertainment industry also questions the presence of an entirely passive audience; the spectacles that were presented still actively moved the late nineteenth-century spectator, especially within the technological elements of display that were adopted by the large venues. The criticism that mass culture resulted in, 'any tension or contradiction between culture and reality' being 'steadily eroded and destroyed' does not hold ground under these conditions. [5]

Late nineteenth-century metropolitan understandings of reality were changing rapidly as a result of technology and the developing urban environment and this state of flux meant that the tension between culture and reality remained. Indeed,

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[5]Gunster, p. 44.

mass culture represented one of the main anxieties of the period, for as Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken have commented in *Cultural Politics at the Fin-de-Siècle:* '[o]ne of the most significant reasons for the disorientation felt in the period was the way in which the new experience of mass culture threw all previous definitions into confusion'. [6] This disruption of social classifications, caused by the rapid growth of the industry of mass culture, resulted in greater potential for the female celebrity to destabilise contemporary ideological values through performance.

The *fin-de-siècle* popular stage and the female celebrity encapsulate the ideas and the anxieties that surrounded the development of metropolitan commodity culture. Adorno's issue with the commodification of art revolved around the thought that 'culture is made specifically for the purpose of being sold': the big-budget film, for example, has a carefully constructed sound-track that is designed to be marketable. [7] This – and the idea of a necessarily passive audience - suggests that the products of mass culture are designed to maintain the *status quo*; to keep society happy. The mainstream theatres, with their emphasis on reflecting the middle-class lifestyle of the Parisian population, were an important part of the creation of this illusion.

Although it is true that the popular entertainment industry was an economically viable commercial sphere at the time, and that acts and programmes were constructed on their marketability, the dance halls placed less emphasis on presenting visions of the bourgeois quotidian experience on stage than the

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[6]Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, eds., *Cultural Politics at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), p. 8.
[7]Ledger and McCracken, p. 46.

mainstream theatres. Rather, these venues were concerned with reflecting the same world of fantasy and pleasure that was also fostered by the department stores and the *expositions universelles*. Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine how this approach can be extended to contend with the representative image of the *fin-de-siècle* mass culture industry, the late nineteenth-century female performer, particularly when the tensions that were caused by her social role are acknowledged. The spectacular themes of the popular stage were not an extension of the respectable domestic sphere; instead they were concerned with display and technology. The historical location of the *fin-de-siècle* popular stage at the epochal moment before the formalisation of the Culture Industry offers an insight into the dualistic approach and anxieties that shaped the period. It allows access to a key area of the city's cultural and performance history, through a similar set of discourses as those that shaped the necessary presence of the female consumer within a new commercial civilisation.

Although the presence of women as consumers in the public spaces of late nineteenth-century Paris was accepted as an undeniable economic necessity, this did not alter the understanding and representation of the business areas of the metropolis as primarily male environments. Instead, as an indirect result of the anxieties that were evoked by the evolving commodity culture and its close relationship with social constructs of gender, the development of an opposing set of urban areas within Paris emerged, that were linked to and represented by concepts of femininity. These spaces were mainly discovered in the areas of the city that were associated with mass culture and were characterised by their qualities of chaos and spontaneity; the antithesis of the clinical and regulated

world that was represented by the white-collar worker and the business spaces of the metropolis. The spectacular Paris that was on display in the cafés and the dance halls, the department stores and the theatres, gradually became identified as feminine.

The gender-based division of urban geographical and social spaces was a reflection of the hierarchical nature of *fin-de-siècle* binaries that Elizabeth Grosz identified in relation to issues of corporeality. In these terms, *fin-de-siècle* mass culture became the negation of aesthetic culture. There is a second important theme contained within this link between mass culture and the feminine, in its affiliation with the contemporary division between conceptions of 'High' and 'Low' art. Nineteenth-century constructs of the term feminine necessarily engaged with the idea of the subordinate: the prerequisite defining condition of the feminine was that it was considered to be secondary to the masculine. This set of geographical and conceptual divisions, along the lines of masculinity and femininity, reveals the central issue of representation that surrounded the nineteenth-century popular stage. The understanding of the mass cultural experience as feminine – chaotic and erotic – made the physical reality of the female celebrity its ideal visual signifier. The body of the performer became the site on which anxieties about the form were inscribed, an idea that was highlighted in Davis's use of the *cancaneuse* to signify the *Moulin Rouge.* The relationships between the female performer, mass culture and modernity were complex: she acted not simply as an embodiment of social ideas, but she also represented a potential moment of agency and subversion that was made possible by the social conditions of the modern city she was a product of.

The attempt to apply a simplistic dualistic approach to Paris's different urban spaces and their audiences, through the authoritarian business and scientific discourses of modernity, reveals an attempt to negate, and consequently to nullify, the concerns that were the result of the growing status and power of women in the public sphere. At the same time, however, it clearly reveals the power that these social forces, based on contemporary understandings of gender, urbanisation and morality, were understood to contain. The city-spaces that were occupied by the entertainment industry were no less modern than the conservative boulevards of central Paris; indeed it can easily be argued that they are more representative of modernity in their adoption of and dependence on its technologies and in their contribution to the spectacle that shaped the city and its international appeal and reputation. *Fin-de-siècle* popular culture was located at the liminal spaces that existed when the strict set of socially constructed dualities failed to be sustainable: masculine/feminine, rational/irrational and 'High'/'Low' culture. If one interprets these sites as inadvertently providing room for potential resistance, then mass culture at the end of the nineteenth century can be read as a hugely opportunistic sphere for liberation or for the subversion of contemporary social ideas.

If the presence of the anonymous female consumer on the streets and in the stores of the city was significant enough to provoke a level of unease and to disrupt contemporary ideology, then the importance of both the female performer and the female spectator of mass culture to the social and economic fabric of the modern metropolis must have caused increasingly greater levels of anxiety.

Especially as the century – and Paris's location as the European centre of spectacle and entertainment – progressed. In spite of this, however, feminism has evaded engaging with the popular female performer, as a result both of the anxieties surrounding corporeality explored in the previous chapter and hierarchical approaches to mass culture that have defined its products as artistically worthless and intrinsically feminine.

Feminism and mass culture

An investigation of the key mass cultural spaces of the late nineteenth-century city, such as the department store, the *exposition universelle* and the popular stage, reveals the displacement of dominant social ideology caused by mass culture. These urban spaces can be interpreted as sites that offered moments of agency, situated between the binary dualities that attempted to locate and secure social life in the modern metropolis. As a result of this potential for disruption the wholly negative approach to the relevance, or value, of mass culture to social constructs of femininity and to resistance to ideas about gender needs to be reconsidered, a position that Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment have indicated in their argument for the recognition of the presence of the female spectator within the mass cultural gaze(s) and the potential role of popular culture to act as an empowering social arena:

> It is not enough simply to dismiss popular culture as merely serving the complementary systems of capitalism and patriarchy [...] It can also be seen as a site where meanings are contested and where dominant ideologies can be disturbed. [8]

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[8]Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, eds., *The Female Gaze:: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* (London: Women's Press, 1988), p. 1.

Although Gamman and Marshment's immediate subject is twentieth-century popular culture, their argument is valuable to the practice of applying feminist ideals retrospectively in order to reclaim the 'herstory' of female creativity:

> To despise and ignore the products of popular culture until they match up to some rigorous and unchanging feminist code of practice is hardly a productive strategy [...] it seems to me that contemporary feminists should be searching not for icons but for inroads to the cultural terrain that constitutes the 'popular' and to the systems of power that define the female subject. [9]

Gamman and Marshment conclude with the suggestion that it would be productive for feminists to investigate cases where women do not fulfil the criteria of the neat model of the 'New Woman', for in these the shaping and defining sources of female subjectivity at work and resistance to systems of power can be traced.

The heterogeneous attitudes, styles and venues that constituted the nineteenth-century popular stage refute the possibility of a single-stranded approach to definition and analysis. Within this variety of entertainment there is evidence of the mass stage as a liberating and empowering performance space for the *fin-de-siècle* female performer. Access to urban, geographical and intellectual spaces was restricted for the majority of women, but access to the popular stage was not and its availability to both the female performer and audience member made it an unlikely – but vital - arena for experimental performance.

In an article discussing the work of the *chanteuse* Yvette Guilbert, Geraldine Harris refers to the Parisian café-concerts as urban spaces that offered a limited amount of creative expression to female performers:

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[9]Gamman and Marshment, p. 188.

> Like many other types of entertainment, the Café-Concert as an institution frequently exploited the female body, manipulated notions of female sexuality, and often functioned as an arena for the promotion of prostitution. Conversely, for women who had 'a voice' these establishments apparently provided a space where talent received recognition and the restraints of class and gender ceased to operate. [10]

It is possible to apply Harris's approach to café-concert culture to the dance-halls, even though it may appear in retrospect that these venues were more closely linked with an explicitly voyeuristic gaze at objectified performers. Issues of corporeality, gender and eroticism undeniably complicate the analysis of the popular stage and this has resulted in the feminist tendency to reclaim the work of performers whose expression did not focus primarily on the body that was discussed in chapter two. This is even intimated in Harris's focus on Guilbert, where she refers to the relative creative liberation that was offered to the popular performer who had 'a voice' – a disembodied talent and form of expression. Even in terms of *chanteuses* like Guilbert, however, it is impossible to separate the 'voice' from the onstage body and the importance of the performer's image, for these were intrinsic to the construction of celebrity at the end of the nineteenth century. Guilbert was acutely aware of the power of the visual image and the centrality of it to her success. In her autobiography she records the image that she chose to adopt, emphasising her unconventional appearance to gain effect: '[f]or economy's sake I would adopt black gloves, and wear a light dress made all in one. The effect I was aiming at was that of a poster, a poster drawn in sharp clear lines, primeval in its simplicity.' [11] Even for the female celebrity whose body was not the vehicle of her artistic expression,

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[10]Geraldine Harris, 'But is it Art?: Female Performers in the Café-Concert', *New Theatre Quarterly* (1989), 334-47 (p. 334).
[11]Yvette Guilbert and Harold Simpson, *Struggles and Victories* (London: Mills and Boon, 1910), p. 101.

her image remained a central element of performance. The danger in the preclusion of the popular stage in the history of female performance is that one canonical, retrospectively defined, hierarchical approach is simply replaced with another, rather than questioned.

What emerges out of a renegotiation of mass culture is the potential for a positive dialectic between the female body and movement: an illustration of the active/passive binary discussed in chapter two. By choosing to perform, the female celebrity publicly rejected the passive and non-corporeal state that was considered to be an ideal quality of femininity and instead took up a position that opposed contemporary constructions of gender, a social role that offered a degree of empowerment. She performed in the site of agency that was located in the liminal spaces that existed between late nineteenth-century strictly dualistic systems of social thought, an active participant in the society of spectacle that characterised *fin-de-siècle* Paris.

The exclusion of mass cultural performance from the history of the experimental stage is predominantly the result of its perceived direct theoretical opposition to the avant-garde. Certainly, in the case of modernity, considerations of experimental performance have been shaped by the diverse presence of the artistic groups of the avant-garde. This is particularly true of Paris with its bohemian societies and the work of many instrumental groups, but it was extremely hard for women to gain access to the spaces and social groups where these innovations were occurring. Christopher Innes characterised the avant-garde as a complex web of aesthetic ideas that cross-fertilise each other. Rather than locating the unifying idea of the avant-garde as a stylistic tendency, understanding it to be 'essentially a philosophical

grouping' whose 'members are linked by a specific attitude to western society, a particular aesthetic approach, and the aim of transforming the nature of theatrical performance: all of which add up to a distinctive ideology'. [12] The application of Innes's approach to the *fin de siècle* in Paris makes it virtually impossible to ignore the influence of Avril and Fuller, across a diversity of the small-scale movements in the city and their relationships with the avant-garde will be discussed in greater detail in chapters four and five. It is important to acknowledge here, however, the manner in which 'High' and 'Low' culture were disrupted during the late nineteenth century, a shift that resulted in the popular stage becoming an experimental arena for the female performer.

The artist, Adolphe Willette, supplies a productive example of how the *avant-garde* and popular culture became progressively more intertwined at the *fin de siècle.* Willette was a central member of *le chat noir* cabaret and designed much of the décor for its home, including its famous stained glass window. *Le chat noir* was founded in December 1881, by the artist and entrepreneur Rodolphe Salis and, as the first example of an artistic cabaret in the city, it is central to a history of experimental performance. *Fin-de-siècle* cabaret communities were comprised of, mainly self-funded, young men who met within small venues that demanded a closer relationship between performer and audience than the popular stage. Parisian cabaret culture embraced this intimacy of environment constructing its aesthetic around the Wagnerian concept of *kleinkunst*: small-scale, synthetic experimentation in marginal art forms that included the chanson, shadow theatre and the cabaret sketch. Immediately it appears that the distance between avant-garde and mass culture was significant, but a brief exploration of

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[12]Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre: 1892-1992* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 4.

Adolphe Willette and *le chat noir* reveals that the construction and sustentation of the opposition was not simple.

In addition to Willette's involvement with the cabaret culture of *fin-de-siècle* Paris and the acclaim that his experimental work received from the avant-garde community, he designed the original windmill that surmounted the *Moulin Rouge* and frequently published comic illustrations in the popular press, particularly the fashionable journal, *La Vie Parisienne*. The role of respected avant-garde figure was clearly not considered to be incompatible with the production of work within the sphere of mass culture for the male artist. It is the retrospective hierarchical approach to mass culture outlined earlier that has resulted in the assumption that this situation cannot be inverted: that experimental performance could not occur on the popular stage.

The artistic output of the *chat noir* was occasionally the subject of ridicule and outrage, but more frequently of interest and intrigue. Salis's mastery of the *fin-de-siècle* art of self-promotion resulted in the cabaret's fashionable status and its role as an essential part of the tourist's Parisian experience, as a contemporary account recorded:

> The Chat Noir vogue quickly spread to high society, and the cabaret soon became a fashionable place. Friday was the "night" devoted more particularly to literary meetings at which guests from the noble suburb arrived in fancy coupes and were welcomed by Salis with an extravagant eloquence drawn from a wide variety of sources. [13]

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[13]Pascal, 'Les Chansons et poesies du Chat Noit', cited in Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw, eds., *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor and the Avant-Garde, 1875-1905* (Rutgers: University of New Jersey, 1996), p. 27.

The location of the *chat noir* as a tourist site, and the decision of the owner Rodolphe Salis to raise the prices of admission and of drinks to exploit this new audience, opened the venue to the same world of commodity culture that shaped the popular stage. The divide between the 'high' culture of the *cabaret-artistique* and the 'low' culture of the popular stage is not as clear-cut as our inherited binaries may initially suggest. In addition to this the cabaret also used the visual spectacle of mass culture and its performers as a creative source and stimulus, as Laurence Senelick has stated:

> [T]he innovators of the cabaret intended to distil from the vaudeville, circus and music halls their vitality, immediacy and vivacity; to adopt the radical alternation of attractions, and then to harness these demotic features in order to convey a rarefied artistic style or liberal political message or a skewed vision of the world. [14]

What becomes clear from both the shift of the artistic cabaret into the commercial sphere and the presence of experimental performance on the popular stage is that the any attempt to divide the public spaces of the city into regulated (male) spaces and chaotic (female) spaces was obviously over-simplistic and as problematic as the binary gendered opposition between the private and the public, or hierarchical opposition between 'high' and 'low' culture. The *fin-de-siècle* relationship between the avant-garde and the popular stage was symbiotic. On many occasions they shared an audience, there was rarely an exclusive aesthetic gaze present at the *cabaret-artistique.* The shadow theatre at the *chat noir*, for example, although celebrated for its influence on figures including Strindberg, Jarry and Maeterlinck, was also marketed to the mass audience of the *fin-de-siècle* city. Both used the city as a source for their aesthetic ideas, and the

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[14]Laurence Senelick, *Cabaret Performance: Europe 1890-1920*, (New York: PAJ Publications, 1989), p. 8.

output of both became part of Paris's system of representation and image. They were also linked by their roles as areas of counter-culture.

Late nineteenth-century spaces of popular culture were linked by the presence of one key element of the experience of modernity: the audience of mass entertainment, which represented the late nineteenth-century's incarnation of the crowd. Nineteenth-century understandings of the crowd as a spontaneous and uncontrollable body of humanity evoked anxieties that were partially responsible for the sense of chaos inherent in images of the arena of mass culture and its subsequent association with femininity. The situation was further exacerbated in France, where the crowd had a specific historical significance in the revolutionary mobs of the country's recurrent revolutions and in the potential for repeated insurrection. Rosalind Williams has identified the core concern that was evoked by the crowd in the late nineteenth century as the result of the sheer incoherence of the body of people it constituted, a reflection of the divergent nature of the citizens of Paris. Williams draws attention to the resulting perceived need to synchronise the desires of the masses, an idea that can be affiliated with Adorno's later understanding of the Culture Industry as a means of reinforcing the *status quo*. [15] It is precisely this social diversity, recognised by Williams and interpreted at the time as the threatening element of the crowd, which allowed widespread access to mass-produced images and emphasises the reality of women in a spectatorial role. The similarities between the crowd and the audience of mass culture shaped contemporary responses to the popular stage.

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[15]Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley' Los Angeles; London: University of California, 1982), p. 348.

To consider the centrality of the crowd to modern modes of spectatorship it is useful to return briefly to the figure of the *flâneur.* The crowd is an historically specific entity that naturally changes according to social conditions: as a body of people it is in a constant state of flux. In his essay, 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863), the poet and critic Charles Baudelaire famously identified the crowd as the source of the *flâneur's* creative energy, stating that, 'the lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy'. [16] What Baudelaire's typology suggests, as explored in chapter one, is the one-way relationship between the spectator and the crowd; Baudelaire's *flâneur* feeds off the visual stimulus offered by the crowd whilst simultaneously retaining his own subjective distance from it. This image also suggests a hierarchical assumption; the *flâneur* is in a privileged position as a result of his higher intellectual, social and aesthetic role. Accounts of looking from the *fin de siècle* instead portray a body of people and the audience of the late nineteenth century thus shifts from the *flâneur* to the activity of *flânerie*, identified by Vanessa Schwartz and discussed in chapter one: the mass audience becomes a group of diverse metropolitan gazes.

This shift in spectatorship – and thus in the nature of the crowd - reveals further evidence of the illogical, and thus unsustainable dualities that shaped society and the entertainment industry. The nature of the crowd that formed the audience of popular culture was partially the result of mass culture, the objects that they looked at made possible through the sophisticated technologies of modernity. At

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[16]Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in Jonathan Mayne, trans. and ed., *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London:Phaidon, 1964), 1-40 (p. 9).

the same time, however, it is understood and represented by ideas of the primeval, pre-modern instincts of humanity. Robert Nye has usefully defined this transition in the nature of the late nineteenth-century crowd:

> [b]y the 1890s crowd phenomena were quickly becoming an integral aspect of the public sphere, [...] Crowds were thus no longer mere *representatives* of local or corporate interests, but dramatic *representations* of powerful new social and cultural forces in the nation-state. [17]

Nye's terms convey the power of the crowd within the public arena and its integral location in the generalised society of spectacle that characterised Paris. It became a key element of the overall aesthetic of display that shaped the metropolis. The emphasis on the public sphere is also important here, for, as the analysis of the metropolitan gaze(s) in chapter one has shown, the city's audience was multi-cultural, multi-gendered and multi-classed.

The level of social concern caused by the crowd is evinced by the contemporary efforts that were made to both demarcate and analyse it, often in language and imagery that echo the attempts to contain sexuality securely through the scientific categorisation of concepts of masculinity and femininity. In 1896, the French psychologist and sociologist, Gustave le Bon (1841-1931), published *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind.* Le Bon's work essays to classify the general characteristics of a collective group of people, his central thesis stipulating that the crowd invokes a primeval element of the human mind and provokes an automatic set of base responses from its members. This is illustrated in the title of the work, *'the Popular Mind'*, suggesting the presence of one single

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[17]Robert A Nye introduction to Gustave le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New Brunswick; London: Transaction, 1995), p. 9.

mindset in the nineteenth-century crowd that could be analysed and understood, regardless of the number of individuals who comprised the body of people:

> When studying the fundamental characteristics of a crowd we stated that it is guided almost exclusively by unconscious motives. Its acts are far more under the influence of the spinal cord than of the brain. In this respect a crowd is closely akin to quite primitive beings.
> [...] A crowd is at the mercy of all external exciting causes, and reflects their incessant variations. It is the slave of the impulses which it receives. The isolated individual may be submitted to the same exciting causes as the man in a crowd, but as his brain shows him the inadvisability of yielding to them, he refrains from yielding.
> [...] This mobility of crowds renders them very difficult to govern
> [...] Like a savage it is not prepared to admit that anything can come between its desire and the realisation of its desire. [18]

Le Bon's immediate subject in this analysis of the danger that is contained within the primitive reactions and responses of the urban crowd is the politically driven mob of insurrection or revolution. This is exemplified through his choice of case study, where he references the short-lived public infatuation with General Georges Boulanger (1837-1891) as characteristic crowd behaviour. [19] Le Bon's focus on this one individual as the focus of public adoration supplies an interesting link with the figure of the celebrity. Boulanger was a master of self-promotion, for example, he would always appear in full military dress on horseback in front of the Parisian masses, an image that earned him the nickname 'Man on Horseback'. Boulanger adopted the technologies of mass culture to ensure his political popularity and success. Le Bon, however, was writing in the middle of the 1890s and the anxieties that his work reveals are at the root of those that were evoked by the contemporary world of mass culture.

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[18]Gustave le Bon, 'The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind', in *1900*, ed. by Mike Jay and Michael Neve (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 152-3.

[19]General Georges Ernest Jean Marie Boulanger turned to politics after France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. The political movement Boulangism was named after him and adopted his advocation of militarism and desire to take revenge on Germany, but he was accused of conspiracy and fled the country in 1889.

Le Bon's focus on the essentially primeval nature he perceived to form the crowd also draws attention to the concept that the object(s) of its attention appeals to the senses, rather than to the mind. The 'external exciting causes' that stimulate the crowd and make it a 'slave of the impulses' reflect the pervasive idea of eroticism and the feminine that can be found encapsulated in descriptions of the popular stage. This concept of mass culture as a new urban and social area that was chaotic, threatening and inherently linked to sexuality, permeates through contemporary responses. The resulting imagery of the uncontrollable, and generally the physical, reinforces the seemingly automatic affiliation between the mass entertainment industry and the feminine noted earlier in this chapter.

The mass audience – the crowd of modernity - forms the main link between the female performer and the technologies and anxieties that are accepted to be characteristic of modernity. There are, however, other important associations between the two, many of which can be traced through the adoption of certain contemporary technical developments within popular culture. Advances in the use of electricity, and the progress in the printing process that culminated in the popularity of the poster, opened up new entertainment styles and the possibility of advertising venues and performances on an enormous scale. Simultaneously, however, these developments both engendered and revealed discourses surrounding popular cultural conceptions of the body, in particular those that focused on the relationship between modernity, technology and commodity. This network of discourses, which centres on corporeality, has resulted in a further tension between feminism and mass culture.

Any discussion of the social construction of the *fin-de-siècle* female celebrity locates women at the discursive core of popular culture and its inseparable themes of corporeality and sexuality. The presence of the sexualised female body within an investigation of the late nineteenth-century entertainment industry is unavoidable, furthermore it would be naïve and reductive to attempt to negate its importance. The focus on corporeality and eroticism, however, does cause some immediate tensions in considering the identity of the popular performer as one that offered an empowering social position. The main result of this level of discomfort with an investigation of the female body as the site of the gaze(s) in the public sphere is evident in the dismissal of mass cultural forms as innately negative sites for the transmission, interpretation or resistance to the dominant social and political ideas of the day. The natural outcome of this line of thought for feminist scholars contending with the *fin de siècle* would be the exclusion of historical examples of mass entertainment. For if popular culture is understood as the transmitter of current ideas surrounding gender then in a patriarchal society it can only be interpreted as examples of a form that misrepresented women and continued their level of oppression. The simple rejection of the world of mass culture as a one-dimensional representation of patriarchal society writes the female performer and spectator out of the performance and cultural history of the period. The resultant historical and critical exclusion of examples of mass culture necessarily involves the loss of the work of popular female performers and the social importance that their work held for the new category of the female spectator. This idea is supported by Adorno's belief that the *fin de siècle* provides an unique incarnation of mass culture and reveals a complex network of contemporary social discourses.

An investigation of the way that new audiences looked at the female celebrity in late nineteenth-century Paris offers access to these interrelated discourses surrounding spectacle, mass culture and femininity and supplies a way of looking at the female body that resists and subverts contemporary constructions of gender. Within this framework the onstage body of the late nineteenth-century female performer can be interpreted as a site of resistance, a moment of agency amidst the gender conceptions of the period, rather than as a manifestation of a patriarchal and voyeuristic society. Chapter one's focus on the renegotiation of the gaze revealed that Laura Mulvey's initial deconstruction of the film industry focused primarily on the nature of its populist output, the movies that were marketed to the mass gaze, thus suggesting that each spectator experienced identical responses to the images presented. Early feminist moves to engage with the gaze seem to echo le Bon's assumption that the crowd, the audience of popular culture, can be understood as sharing one mind, producing a single set of responses and desires. The reductive nature that unites these approaches is problematic and eliminates the possibility of subverting and reconfiguring the gaze(s) that was central to the work of the female performer and the experience of the female spectator.

The *fin-de-siècle* female celebrity

The nineteenth-century French female celebrity emerged as a popular cultural figure at the intersection of the Second Empire (1852-1870) and the Third Republic (1870-1914) and her developing incarnations can be traced through an

exploration of the Cancan dancers and café-concert singers of the period. This location of the female celebrity in a specific historic moment is not to claim that there were not famous female performers prior to this time, simply that the technologies of modernity opened up the world of mass advertising that we now recognise as being one of the key areas that defines celebrity: marketing imagery gave the city access to the female celebrity in a new way. During the second half of the century the female popular stage performer became a cultural icon, reflected in her appearance as a frequent figure in the literature and art of the period. Two literary incarnations, Emile Zola's, *Nana* (1880) and George du Maurier's, *Trilby* (1894), offer contrasting visions of the female performer. Although neither of these accounts of the role of the female celebrity are positive, they do give access to the set of ideas surrounding her at the time. The fact that both of the works are eponymous is also of significance, as it suggests the current trend to talk about celebrities in a familiar way.

Emile Zola's *Nana,* a study of the downfall of a courtesan, exemplifies the difference between female performance as eroticism and performance as expression, a transition that occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century. The 1850s and the 1860s witnessed many of the *grandes horizontales* (the infamous courtesans of the Second Empire), such as Liane de Pougy and Cléo de Mérode, briefly taking to the stage. This occurred within a diversity of entertainment genres, though most famously as performers of the Cancan at venues such as the *Folies-Bergère.* For these women, however, their role as performers was primarily a periodic, and effective, means to secure a new admirer: secondary to their role as courtesans, although it is true that this was a

performance in itself that reflected the fascination with spectacle at the time. In this way the courtesan and the celebrity were inherently linked: courtesans were renowned throughout the city in the same way as performers, images printed in the press made them easily recognisable and their appearance at social events was eagerly anticipated. This fame, however, was entirely the result of their presence as a continual source of gossip for the respectable bourgeois society that they had invaded, rather than as a result of any artistic talent that they may have possessed.

Zola allows Nana no autonomy as a stage performer. She is referred to as the invention of the manager of the Parisian *Théâtre des Variétés*, Bordenave, a 'notorious exhibitor of women' [20], who refuses to refer to his theatre as anything other than a 'brothel [...] with the cold obstinacy of a man of conviction'. [21] The *Théâtre des Variétés* acts as an emblematic example of the arena of the popular middle-class stage in Paris, it seats in excess of 1500 spectators and the evening's entertainment described by Zola continues for over three hours, with spectators coming and going during the performance. The novel opens with Nana's debut on the Parisian stage, an event that has been the subject of major hype across the city: an encapsulation of the modern forces of the mass press and urban gossip that reveals that the city's courtesans were marketed in the same way as the later female celebrities. Consequently, '[t]he whole of Paris was there, the Paris of letters, of finance and of pleasure'. [22] When Nana finally arrives on the stage to perform her first song in the evening's play, a romantic musical comedy based on the gods of Olympus, her lack of talent is immediately apparent to the audience:

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[20]Emile Zola, *Nana*, ed. and trans. by George Holden (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 20.
[21]Zola, p. 22.
[22]Zola, p. 28.

> She didn't even know how to deport herself on the stage: she thrust her arms out in front, swaying her whole body in a manner which struck the audience as vulgar and ungraceful. [...] Nana, in the meantime, seeing the audience laughing, began to laugh herself. The general gaiety increased. There was no denying she was an amusing creature, this lovely girl. [...] She herself seemed to be admitting with a wink that she had no talent at all, but that that didn't matter, because she had something else. [...] When she came to the end of the verse, her voice failed her completely, and she realized that she would never get through the whole song. So, without getting flustered, she thrust out one hip which was roundly outlined under a flimsy tunic, bent backwards, so that her breasts were shown to good advantage, and stretched out her arms. [...] Then the audience became positively frantic. [23]

Clearly Zola is raising important questions surrounding the dynamics of the gaze(s) and Nana's exploitation of them in the performance of her everyday life, as well as in her stage presence, within the novel. It is the explicit collusion with the metropolitan gaze(s), through the discourses of eroticism and sexuality, however, which frames the account of Nana's performance. The moments before Nana's onstage appearance provokes an example of the worrying aspects of crowd behaviour that were defined by le Bon, the audience, 'demanding Nana in one of those accesses of silly facetiousness and crude sensationality which take hold of crowds'. [24] It is for this reason – collusion with the gaze(s) - that the *courtesan*, the early incarnation of the well-publicised example of a woman who took to the stages of mass culture in Paris, does not fulfil the definition of celebrity that this thesis engages with; this being a performer who gains her fame predominantly through her performance (whether it was considered to be 'High' or 'Low' culture), even if it is subsequently sustained through the technologies of celebrity that can be seen at work here. This is not a simple definition; rather there are many inherent crossovers, exemplified in the fact that the scandalous

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[23]Zola, p. 33.
[24]Zola, p. 26.

existences of many of the later *cancaneuses* who were not courtesans cemented their celebrity status and their popularity. What needs to be avoided is the construction of a new set of dualities to contend with those that existed in the nineteenth century.

The role of the late nineteenth-century female celebrity as a cultural icon is an important element of a feminist interpretation of gender and experimental performance during the period. The English novelist, George du Maurier discusses the manner in which celebrities were viewed and represented as creations or embodiments of male fantasy in *Trilby.*

Trilby: The 1890s Female Celebrity as a Passive Vessel

> That [Svengali's] Trilby was just a singing machine – an organ to play upon - [...] When Svengali's Trilby was being taught to sing ... when Svengali's Trilby was singing or seemed to you as if she were singing – *our* Trilby had ceased to exist ... *our* Trilby was fast asleep ... in fact, *our* Trilby was dead. [25]

Trilby tells of the hypnotic possession of a young, beautiful artists' model, Trilby O'Farrell, by the musician Svengali. Trilby falls in love with a young English painter, Little Billee, who returns her feelings and the opening section of the novel is devoted to the tale of their times in Paris in the company of Billee's compatriots, Taffy and the Laird and also the menacing figure of Svengali. Their union is prevented, however, by the intervention of Billee's mother who disapproves of Trilby's background and pleads with the model not to marry her son. Trilby leaves Paris and on her return to the city re-encounters the musician

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[25]George du Maurier, *Trilby* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1995), p. 240.

Svengali, who offers her marriage and then teaches her to sing through hypnosis, takes on the role of her manager and turns her into a major celebrity, known as La Svengali. The relationship between Trilby and Svengali is founded on his psychic power over her, and the accompanying fear that she feels of him: he governs both her corporeal and mental state with his mind. The discourses surrounding mesmerism that are used to describe Svengali's control over Trilby are evidence of the modern references that shape the text. *Trilby* is loosely based upon du Maurier's own experiences as a fine art student in Paris in the late 1850s. Du Maurier is a highly self-conscious author, however, and he frequently intervenes into the text with comments that make his own '1890s-ness' clear, giving the mid nineteenth-century bohemian artistic community that he presents a decidedly *fin-de-siècle* edge. As a renowned caricaturist and a frequent contributor to *Punch*, George du Maurier was well-educated in topical issues and in the discourses of the fashionable contemporary satire of the modern world that shaped the periodical. The blend of popular culture, melodrama and more socially aware, intellectual themes that shape the novel reveal this merge of popular and elitist ideas. In *Trilby,* du Maurier's characteristic style acutely highlights the web of ideas that surrounded the relationships between femininity, corporeality and celebrity in the late nineteenth century.

Du Maurier was clearly familiar with the social and intellectual realities of the female celebrity, for he explicitly locates Trilby within the international commodity culture of the period. The first time La Svengali performs in the novel is at the *Cirque de Bashibazoucks,* the circus arena supplying an example of the quintessential venue of popular culture. On her first appearance in Paris

he describes her stage entrance thus: 'her snowy arms and shoulders bare, a gold coronet of stars on her head, her thick light brown hair tied behind and flowing all down her back to nearly her knees, like those ladies in hair-dressers' shops who sit with their backs to the plate-glass window to advertise the merits of some particular hair-wash'. [26] These images and ideas are realistic, as a comparison of the build up to Trilby's fictional performance in Paris and Loïe Fuller's arrival in London for her 1899 tour reveals:

> La Svengali has arrived in London. Her name is in every mouth. Her photograph is in the shop-windows. [...] A crowd of people as usual, only bigger, is assembled in front of the windows of the Stereoscopic Company in Regent Street gazing at presentments of Madame Svengali in all sizes and costumes. [27]
>
> The windows of London are at present decorated with a profusion of photographs of La Loïe, some of which are very interesting, representing as they do the artist in most strange characteristic attitudes. [28]

Du Maurier uses the novel to reinforce, yet question, the nineteenth-century myths surrounding Paris and the female performer. In this way the character of Trilby acts as a representation of the extreme point at which the construction of a celebrity image becomes identified and understood as a manifestation of subjectivity. Trilby existed in the space between reality and fantasy at the *fin de siècle,* as the popularity of the character suggests.

The character of *Trilby* became a cultural icon, a celebrity in her own right. The fame of the tale increased further after the English stage adaptation of the play appeared in London in 1895, starring the popular Victorian actor and theatre

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[26]Du Maurier, p. 164.
[27]Du Maurier, p. 193.
[28]'La Loïe Fuller and her Artistic Achievements', *The Poster*, February 1899, p. 74.

manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree. The success of the play can be gauged from the fact that Tree was able to build His Majesty's Theatre entirely from the profits of the play. [29] In the same way that Loie Fuller inspired a whole range of products that reflected her performance, the department stores of London, Paris and New York began to stock 'Trilbyana' merchandise based on her character, including, of course, the Trilby hat. This adoption of a fictional figure as a real celebrity reveals a blurring of the definite boundaries between reality and fantasy at the *fin-de-siècle.*

> [...] the novel became almost a mania with the American reading public [...] All previous records for 'best sellers' were surpassed, and the word 'Trilby' for many months was ubiquitous [...] There were 'Trilby parties' (at which extracts were read and question papers answered), 'Trilby shoes' and even 'Trilby' sweets and lozenges. [30]

The novel raises important questions surrounding the entertainment industry, particularly through the use of Svengali to consider issues surrounding the role and status of the female performer and the power of men within popular culture. Although the European metropolitan world was familiar with her stage name, that name made her an extension of Svengali; as a celebrity Trilby was transformed into La Svengali, the creation and possession of her husband. A transfiguration so complete that even Taffy, the Laird and Little Billee initially have trouble convincing themselves that it is actually their old acquaintance on the stage. Du Maurier focuses on the figure of the male manager, of whom there were many during this period who could launch – and control – the stars of the popular venues: figures like Charles Zidler and Joseph Oller, managers of the *Moulin Rouge.*

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[29]Derek Pepys Whiteley, *George du Maurier: His Life and Work* (London: Art and Technics, 1948), p. 33.
[30]Whiteley, p. 32.

The notion that the *fin-de-siècle* female celebrity was entirely superficial, superimposed on vessel-like women by representatives of patriarchal culture, is interesting. The transitory transformation on stage that is provoked by the presence of another encapsulates hierarchical attitudes towards popular culture. This is an idea that is reinforced by the material that Trilby performs in her sell-out concerts where she sings variations of simple nursery rhymes, whose nonsensical words entrance her audience. Du Maurier's *Trilby* is a critical exposé of the arena of mass culture and the technologies of modernity that made the rise of the late nineteenth-century female performer possible. These two negative images of the female performer as object, infused with 'creative' power only by the men who surround them, be it the audience of Bordenave's theatre or the hypnotic presence of Svengali, highlight the tensions between feminism and mass culture.

The female performer in Paris was located outside the contemporary construction of femininity. In this way she fulfilled what Eugen Weber has identified as a 'dubious status' within late nineteenth-century society. [31] The term 'dubious' initially appears to be negative; however, within the historical context of the period it can also be read to imply a social location that offered a degree of liberation. Within the world of modernity, with its preoccupation with the construction and maintenance of solid categories of identification, in particular with reference to the definition of gender, female performers slipped through the boundaries of classification. It is vitally important that these women were on the stage in a culture that attempted to keep them out of public spaces.

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[31]Eugen Weber, *France: Fin-de-Siècle*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Belknap, 1986), p. 175.

The *fin de siècle* witnessed a shift in the role and the representation of the female celebrity, as a result of which she became significantly more complex as both a social figure and a cultural icon. Jane Avril's and Loïe Fuller's performance careers offered them access to the public arena of Parisian daily life and a key role in the spectacle that shaped and represented the city; hence the dubious identity that Weber identified as central to the female performer. In spite of this necessary involvement in the public sphere of metropolitan life, however, a significant proportion of the press, marketing and personal responses that surrounded Avril and Fuller stressed their femininity and relatively high moral status, not any explicit eroticism. This signals a transition from Pollock's belief that, for a woman, entering the public areas of the city meant renouncing one's femininity and supplies a direct contrast to the public and press reaction to earlier performers, and to some of Avril's and Fuller's contemporaries, as will be explored further in the comparison of Jane Avril and La Goulue in chapter four. One key element of this transition in the understanding of the female performer is contained in the very fact that her work can be identified as a career, a term that suggests economic independence and a level of control over her own artistic agenda. With this in mind, it is useful to explore one of the main areas of technology that linked the female performer and modernity and also had a direct relationship with her appearance and representation within popular culture: the entertainment lithograph.

The entertainment lithograph: a window on mass culture

The transitory nature of mass culture (with the majority of performances being unscripted) and the low artistic status that it was credited with in the late nineteenth century has resulted in a scantly recorded history of the popular stage. In spite of this, however, the *fin-de-siècle* ascent of the figure of the female celebrity as a cultural icon, and the resulting public interest in every element of her life, means that she was documented in the ephemeral products that were associated with the industry. Information can be discovered in the columns of the popular press, the posters that advertised the stars and the venues and in the contemporary trend for celebrities to publish their memoirs. The lithographic images that originally served to advertise venues such as the *Moulin Rouge* and the *Folies-Bergère* amidst the competition of the Parisian entertainment industry were equally important in their own time. Posters offer an insight into the marketing industry that supported the mass entertainment that was on offer in the *fin-de-siècle* city. They are an intrinsic part of this historical moment and a key part of the spectacle of contemporary Paris. The entertainment lithograph encompasses the discourses that surrounded the powerful presence of art within the public gaze, the change in representation of the female form and the technological advancements of industrial modernisation.

The nineteenth-century metropolis witnessed the birth of mass publicity, with the walls of cities covered in posters whose bright colours had recently been made possible by developments in printing techniques. The Third Republic's eradication of the previously rigid censorship laws that had restricted the content

and display of the poster resulted in its developing status as a creative work of art, as well as a means of advertisement. This was a result of more posters being commissioned and the desire for novelty within the competition of advertisement. The impact that the popularity of the poster had on the late nineteenth-century cityscape is made clear by the critic Ernest Maindron's complaint that: "[...] poster hangers use every unoccupied space, without restraint and without respect, and overrun us to the point of robbing us, poor Parisians, of the sight of our monuments!" [32] Through this power to transform the Parisian vista, the poster inherently publicised itself. It became a representation of the transitory nature of the modern urban experience, replacing the monumental vistas of Paris with an ever-changing vision of colour. 'Florence has, in her streets and squares, a museum of marble and bronze; the poster has given Paris a museum of pictures, an open-air exhibition of art'. [33] Recovering the original context of the poster makes the fundamental intertextual nature of the form clear. The continuing debate that surrounded its artistic value, its primary function as advertisement and its very method of display on the streets of Paris combine to reinforce its position as the central public art form of the late nineteenth century.

The mass-produced lithograph is also a product of the beginning of the Culture Industry that was identified earlier in this chapter. The popularity of lithography resulted in art being mass-produced; posters were produced in huge quantities and many of their creators - accepted as famous, collectable artists - were not afraid to mix art and advertisement. Specialist stores opened in the metropolis

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[32]cited in Alan Weill, *The Poster: A Worldwide Survey and History*, trans. Marilyn Myatt (London: Sotheby's Publications, 1985), p. 31.
[33]Jules Claretie, cited in Jane Abdy, *The French Poster: Chéret to Cappiello* (London: Studio Vista, 1969), p. 9.

for the sale of limited editions of print runs. Poster art advertised and celebrated a *fin-de-siècle* lifestyle of events, cabarets, beverages, and cigarettes through the use of familiar images or 'popular idiom'. [34] The work of artists like Toulouse-Lautrec, Jules Chéret and Alphonse Mucha was wholly intertextual, the images they produced were inseparable from the environment that inspired or commissioned them and in which they were created. Through this dynamic relationship with the urban environment, the poster provides access to mainstream ideas about the representation of women.

Many artists found the form, with its flat blocks of colour and harsh lines, liberating and the lithograph is reminiscent of some of the key influences on modernist art, notably the early Japanese prints and wood cuts, as well as the uses of colour adopted by Gauguin and the Pont Aven school. Yet, in spite of the fact that posters quickly became highly collectible works of art, the institutional artistic centres of Paris deeply disapproved of the universal appeal of the form and of its simple use of bright colours. The entertainment lithograph – and the venues and performers that it advertised - were at the core of the 'High'/'Low' culture debate that divided the artistic community. Yet, in spite of academic and cultural controversy, the audience of the poster was classless: anyone who was passing in the street had access to the image, although the luxury product it advertised was generally reserved for the bourgeoisie. Individuals from across the diversity of metropolitan spectatorial positions were invited to respond to a relatively egalitarian use of word and image. Roger Marx, a contemporary social commentator, celebrated the role of the poster as a means to break down

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[34]John Barnicoat, *Posters: A Concise History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p. 28.

concepts of taste that were wholly rooted in class hierarchy, as a way to transcend the social and economic position of the spectator, uniting them in their admiration of the work before them. Marx's response does seem overly idealistic, but it does establish the contemporary understanding of the potential of the poster to act as a social and ideological tool, an approach that encompasses visions of the period as one of relative cultural democracy and echoes the anxieties surrounding the caricature and the crowd.

Figure five: Paul Berthon, 'Folies-Bergère: Liane de Pougy' (1895).

Fin-de-siècle female performers provided a constant source of inspiration for contemporary artists. Both the female performer and the poster artist are integrally linked to the mass cultural industry of the time and to the technological developments of modernity. Neither would have enjoyed such levels of success without the dynamic relationship that existed between them. It is possible to

trace the transition in the understanding and representation of the female performer through the changes in the way that she was advertised. The courtesans discussed above had been the subject of posters since the middle of the nineteenth century and figure five, a poster designed to promote the appearance of Liane de Pougy at the *Folies-Bergère* in 1895 reveals that the visual codes employed to represent this groups of performers remained unchanged until the *fin de siècle.* In this image it is clear that the star's appeal is the result of her renown and her physical appearance, for the artist has made no attempt to portray her as an active performer.

The lithograph once again raises the question of woman as object and it is vital to acknowledge the twentieth-century feminist denunciation of the use of the female body, and particularly of fragmented parts of the body, as a means of advertisement at this point. It is equally important to note, however, that in nineteenth-century Paris the use of an alluring woman to sell a product was completely revolutionary – there was no pre-existing debate surrounding the subject. The entertainment poster gave the whole city access to representations of the female performer: representations that she often commissioned and controlled. It is the lithographic works of Jules Chéret (1836-1933) and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901) that epitomise the nineteenth-century entertainment poster.

There is a stark contrast between the representations of women in the work of Chéret and of Toulouse-Lautrec that is particularly relevant to the image of the female performer. [35] Jules Chéret is acknowledged as having established the poster as an art form. He produced in excess of one thousand posters during his lifetime, the majority of which have a woman as their central motif. Chéret's emblematic depiction of the *Parisienne* as a carefree, laughing figure with tumbling auburn hair, became so easily identifiable that she became known as the '*Chérette*'. These posters make this one repeated image of woman appear to be a general representative of an ideal female, in turn creating their own particular construction of femininity. Loïe Fuller commissioned figure six in 1893, to advertise her performances at the *Folies-Bergère.* It is striking that the poster bears virtually no resemblance to the dancer, especially when considering Fuller's fondness for it (a copy of it hung in her suite of rooms at the venue). Photographs reveal that Fuller was a fairly stocky brunette, but Chéret's work transforms her into another titian-haired sylph-like beauty. This transfiguration raises an interesting set of questions surrounding Fuller's self-representation and celebrity that will be explored further in chapter five. Chéret's poster of Fuller reveals the scant attention that he devoted to presenting any kind of realistic representation of his model; instead the woman before him was repeatedly moulded into a version of his own physical ideal of femininity.

35I have written further of this elsewhere: 'Parisian Mass Culture, the Female Celebrity and the Entertainment Lithograph: *Fin-de-siècle* Questions of Corporeality', unpublished conference paper. 'The 1890s', University of Newcastle, July 2001.

Figure six: Jules Chéret, 'La Loïe Fuller' (1893).

The popularity and familiarity of Chéret's images of the *fin-de-siècle* entertainment industry had a direct influence on the representation of the female performer and questions of corporeality. As Marcus Verhagen has identified in an article on the cultural role of lithography, 'The Poster in *Fin-de-siècle* Paris: "That Mobile and Degenerate Art"':

> Impish and provocative, the *chérette* was a figure of brazen sexual invitation, but her suspension undermined the corporeality of her presence and removed her pantomime of desire to the realm of fantasy. Apparently she offered and transcended her body in a single movement. [36]

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[36]Marcus Verhagen, 'The Poster in *Fin-de-siècle* Paris: "That Mobile and Degenerate Art"', in Charney, Leo and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley; London: University of California, 1995), p. 105.

Chéret's posters negotiate the threat contained within the physicality of the female performer by inseparably combining her image with the ethereal ideals of feminity discussed earlier and thus decentralising her corporeality. In contrast to this Toulouse-Lautrec represented the female celebrity as an active embodied performer.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's choice of subject for his posters revolved around the Montmartre world that he inhabited. The enduring appeal of his lithographic posters is exemplified when one notes that he only produced 31 in comparison to over 5000 drawings and 1000 paintings, yet they remain the most familiar pieces of his work. The majority of the female performers of the period whose names we recognise – including Jane Avril, Yvette Guilbert and La Goulue - owe at least part of their legacy to their immortalisation in Toulouse-Lautrec's lithography. Toulouse-Lautrec also produced a series of sixty lithographic images of Loïe Fuller in 1893, all of which were printed individually (figure seven). He also used this set of works to experiment with colour and texture, hand finishing some of the pieces with gold and silver powder. David Sweetman has referred to this representation of Fuller as an 'amoebic blob', but it offered a much more realistic vision of the effect of the dancer in performance than the work of Chéret. [37]

[37]David Sweetman, *Touluse-Lautrec and the Fin-de-Siècle* (London: Hodder Headline, 1999), p. 300.

Figure seven: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, 'Loïe Fuller' (1893).

Toulouse-Lautrec's refreshing exploratory approach to the lithograph is clear in his representations of women, for unlike Chéret's cloned redheads, he was more interested in representing the individual character of his model. This focus on the idiosyncrasies of his subject minimises the objectification of the female body, highlighting its uniqueness, a style that was not always appreciated in his time. 'His works are delineations of life as seen by a man, who, possessing the most acute powers of observation, is poignantly impressed by the incongruities of modern life.' [38]

Fuller's lack of interest in Toulouse-Lautrec's images of her, in spite of the close relationship that she maintained with many of the city's artists, leads back to the same questions of identity raised by her choice of Chéret to produce her

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[38]Charles Hiatt, cited in Jane Abdy, *The French Poster: Chéret to Cappiello* (London: Studio Vista, 1969), p. 74.

advertising. In contrast to this, when exploring the production of Toulouse-Lautrec's work, it is also vital to recognise that on many occasions the model's presence in the posters was the result of a conscious choice, made in order to gain publicity. This disrupts the normal position of women drawn by men as the model or muse figure, whose sole role is to inspire the artist. Instead, the female subject of the poster has an active commercial interest in its production and a creative interest inasmuch as it acts as a representation of her performance style to some degree. This too can be exemplified through Lautrec's long-lasting relationship with Jane Avril who commissioned posters from him for a planned tour of England. Unlike Jules Chéret's posters, Toulouse-Lautrec's work was the result of a dialectical process; the artist had the talent and the following to place representations of female celebrities right into the heart of Parisian spectacle, a power that his models often used as a vehicle to enhance their fame and their status.

The entertainment lithograph offered the female celebrity a limited degree of control over the way in which she was represented across the metropolis. Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller both commissioned works to advertise their appearances at the city's popular venues. There is one other key area where women could exercise control over their onstage appearance, through the use of costume. This is particularly interesting because it clearly differentiates Avril and Fuller from other female performers. Both Avril and Fuller designed their own costumes, rather than wearing clothes given to them by the fashion houses or department stores that often dressed the casts of the vaudeville stages of the city. Rather than acting as advertisements, or using their dress as pure ornamentation, Avril and

Fuller used costume as an integral part of their performances. In an article considering the trend for 'nudity' on the Victorian variety stage, Tracy C. Davis defines the culturally specific, erotic meaning of displayed flesh:

> Female performers were commodified as the wearers of revealing costumes, but it was the revealed parts, not the costumes themselves that were the real spectacle: the places where the costumes 'were not' took focus over where they 'were'. [39]

Fragmented areas of flesh became the focus of the audience's gaze(s), thus breaking the female body down into sections of flesh that became visual signifiers of sexuality. In the same way as this use of costume on the popular Victorian stage drew attention to flesh through this emphasis on places that were left uncovered, the perceived eroticism of the Cancan was greatly due to the spaces of the body that were revealed (in particular the space at the top of the thigh between the stocking and pantaloon).

Davis's argument supplies a useful starting point for considering the differences between the performances of Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller and productions where the erotic effect was the primary concern. In direct contrast to the fragmented images of the female body that Davis identifies on the Victorian stage, Avril and Fuller presented themselves as whole, corporeal onstage presences. Their costumes were carefully designed to draw attention to themselves, their whole embodied presences onstage. This was true mainly of the way in which both dancers used an inseparable combination of colour and fabric, animated by the movement of the body, to create their performance styles. Neither Avril's nor Fuller's work would have been possible without their experimental use of fabrics

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[39]Tracy C. Davis, 'The Spectacle of Absent Costume: Nudity on the Victorian Stage', *New Theatre Quarterly* (1989), 321-33 (p. 322).

and colours so integral were they to the overall effect. The sense of organicism that these costumes resulted in supplies one of the main links between Avril, Fuller and the development of modern dance.

Furthermore, Avril's and Fuller's use of costume design rejected the emphasis on obvious artificiality as a key element of the construction of the ideal onstage representation of eroticised femininity, the importance of which is made clear in the writings of the poet and critic Arthur Symons. In her thesis, 'Decadence and Sexual politics in Three *Fin-de-Siècle* Writers: Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons and Vernon Lee', Catherine Ruth Robbins suggests that Symons's cities were 'borderland spaces' that were not concerned with the prescribed and legitimised cultural experiences offered by monuments or art galleries, but with the physical and mental sensations provoked by the metropolis by night. [40] This naturally leads to the recurring theme of the popular entertainment industry within his poetic and literary works.

In Symons's view the primary objective in the design of dancers' costumes should be to emphasise and flatter the female form. Simultaneously, the costume design should not draw attention to any specific performer; rather the stage should be populated with a recurring typology of the ideal feminine. In her study of the image of the dancer in the work of W. B. Yeats, *The Plays of W. B. Yeats: Yeats and the Dancer*, Sylvia Ellis notes that Symons was unimpressed by a production of the ballet, *Monkey Island,* that he saw at the Alhambra in 1894 (immediately contemporaneous with Avril's and Fuller's popularity on the

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[40]Catherine Ruth Robbins, "Decadence and Sexual Politics in Three *Fin-de-Siècle* Writers: Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons and Vernon Lee' (unpublished thesis, 1996), p. 140.

Parisian stage). One of Symons's central criticisms of the piece was its costume design. He argued that, '[t]he sight of an Italian *prima ballerina,* dressed as a male monkey [...] is not an agreeable one' and that:

> there is no change of costume throughout the three *tableaux,* and there are practically only two dresses – the white sailor suits and the brown-and-grey monkey arrangements. Neither of them is a graceful dress for a girl, both being arbitrary in what they accentuate and what they obscure in the female figure [...] [41]

Symons's choice of the word 'tableaux' and his insistence that, 'one does not go to see a ballet in order to follow a story; one goes to see beautiful dancing, beautiful dancers and dresses', is significant here. [42] Symons also reveals the extreme duality of mass culture in his work, for in his creative (and by implication erotic) imagination, the popular stage, 'is an exclusively feminine space', where, 'the audience is exclusively male: the (female) dancers are watched and the (male) audience watches'. [43] Symons's writings on dance are mainly focused on London and Paris, and these gender binaries were not present in either of the two cities. The variety theatres that Symons visited had as many male performers as female and the audience certainly contained women as well as men.

The creation of the beautiful stage picture Symons desires depends upon the presence of the female body, but the word 'tableaux' suggests stationery; that the ballet as a whole should be constructed of a sequence of 'freeze-framed' picturesque images. This reflects the ideas present in late nineteenth-century art that the still, and therefore passive, female body was easier to objectify and to

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[41]Cited in Sylvia B. Ellis, *The Plays of W. B. Yeats: Yeats and the Dancer* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1995), p. 169.
[42]Ellis, p. 170.
[43]Robbins, p. 185.

classify. In direct contrast to this, the aesthetic effect of Avril's and Fuller's performance relied entirely upon the animation of the fabric of their costumes through physical movement: when the female onstage body ceased to move, the effect was over and not at its peak, as in Symons's ideal view.

The transition in the use of costume on the popular stage that is evident in the performances of Avril and Fuller indicates one of the main challenges offered by an investigation of their work: its location at the intersection of the popular variety stage of the music hall, with its renditions of dance forms such as the Cancan, and the development of modern dance as an aesthetically celebrated modern art form. The cultural transposition of dance, from a 'Low' to a 'High' art form, is concurrent with the work of Avril and Fuller at the end of the nineteenth century and is evinced in the centrality of dance to the literary and poetic aesthetics of early modernism. The significance of the female dancer in the work of the symbolist poet and theoretician Stéphane Mallarmé and in the theatrical concepts of W. B. Yeats supply two examples of this and both will be discussed further in line with Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller.

Throughout history dance has generally been accepted as a quintessentially feminine art form. This was no less true than in the late nineteenth century, when the legacy of the heyday of romantic ballet, with the fame of dancers such as Taglioni, was swiftly followed by the work of the early modern dancers, most famously in the cases of Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham. An investigation of the social and aesthetic understandings of the *fin-de-siècle* dancer is important in a consideration of the ways that approaches to modern

dance have further complicated the field. This transitional position means that it is important to consider writings on modern dance in line with Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller and to negotiate any problems that occur as a result of applying a specifically dance studies approach to performances for which Loïe Fuller argued, 'there ought to be a word better adapted to the thing'. [44]

The critic Frank Kermode linked Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller in his study of the symbolist aesthetic, *The Romantic Image,* and he returned to the subject in an article concerned with the role of the dancer as a recurring image in symbolist poetry. In the latter piece, he concluded that, although, 'Avril is a smaller figure altogether, [...] she demonstrates the strength of the link between dancing and poetry, as well as the important pathological element in the dancer's appeal'. [45] The question of pathology and aesthetics that Kermode raises here is central as it is connected with the discursive fields of femininity and corporeality that have been raised in the previous two chapters of this thesis. In particular, it is an idea that is of interest to the study of the female body, as the discourses surrounding pathology do not arise in considerations of the later male modern dancers who emerged in Paris and across Europe, for example the work of Nijinsky and other members of Diaghilev's *ballets russes.* The experimental performance of Jane Avril reveals the convergence of contemporary constructions of femininity, embodiment, performance and insanity.

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[44]Loïe Fuller, *Fifteen Years of a Dancer's Life, with Some Account of her Distinguished Friends* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1913), p. 70.
[45]Frank Kermode, "Poet and Dancer before Diaghilev', in *Partisan Review* 28 (1961), 48-75 (p.49).

Chapter Four: Jane Avril: Femininity, Insanity and Constructions of Celebrity.

> Suddenly, she departs from her own rhythm, breaks it, and creates a new one; she seems never tired, always re-inventing herself. [1]

The figure of Jane Avril (1868-1943) remains absent from the majority of the performance histories of the late nineteenth century, in spite of the familiarity of her image from contemporary lithographs. [2] Indeed, it seems likely that Avril would have disappeared completely from the study of *fin-de-siècle* popular performance had she not been immortalised in the enduringly appealing posters of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Jane Avril's and Toulouse Lautrec's artistic philosophies were both rooted in the employment of art as a means of escapism from their immediate surroundings: the artist discovered in the lithograph a liberating form of expression and the dancer was famed for her claim that she only ever danced for her own pleasure. This connection between the dancer and the quintessential visual chronicler of the late nineteenth-century entertainment scene has ensured that a minimal amount of information surrounding Avril has been preserved, both in the numerous visual images of her that Toulouse-Lautrec produced and in biographical commentaries concerning the painter.

Jane Avril's virtual disappearance from retrospective analysis of the aesthetics of the *fin de siècle* raises important questions that surround the exclusion of women from

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[1]Paul Jean Toulet, cited in José Shercliff, *Jane Avril of the Moulin Rouge* (London: Jarrolds, 1952), p. 87.
[2]There are three main extant sources of information that I have been able to discover concerning Jane Avril. The dancer published her memoirs in *Paris-Midi*, during August 1933. There is a highly romanticized, semi-biographical, novel – *Jane Avril of the Moulin Rouge* - based on Avril's biography and written by her friend Jose Shercliff, whom she first met when the journalist was sent to Paris by the *Daily Express* to interview her. The French scholar of the Parisian avant-garde, Francois Caradec, has published a more authoritative guide to the life of the dancer, mainly based on the information contained in her memoirs and at the archives of the *Musée de Montmartre* in Paris.

the documentation and consideration of the early modernist period. These are similar issues to those considered in relation to the masculinity of Paris's artistic cabarets and to those that Griselda Pollock has questioned in line with the birth and development of impressionist art. Pollock's conclusion, that twenty-first century understandings of early modernist experimentation have been retrospectively constructed, according to a specific political and social agenda, offers one reason for Avril's absence. The performance form that she experimented within supplies a second: dance, on the popular stage, formed part of the ephemeral commodity culture that shaped the nineteenth-century metropolis. The combination of this contemporary valuation of dance and later aesthetic judgments of mass culture as 'Low' culture have contributed to the lack of scholarly interest in the work of Avril and other popular performers of the *fin de siècle*. As these ideas suggest, an investigation of Jane Avril's performance style, and contemporary responses to it, locate her amidst the dualistic system of thought that shaped *fin-de-siècle* society. Focusing on two environments where Avril performed – the *Salpetrière* hospital and the *Moulin Rouge* - this chapter seeks to explore the manner in which Avril appropriated contemporary representations of femininity to develop her creative process and her self-construction as a celebrity.

The grace and individuality of Jane Avril's performance style and her relative intelligence and interest in the diversity of Paris's artistic innovations, singled her out amongst the other performers of the popular stage. As a figure she bridged the gap between the popular world of the dance hall and the avant-garde spaces of the city, emphasising her location in the site of agency in between the binaries of

'High'/'Low' culture. Contextually the dancer was a cultural icon in late nineteenth-century Paris who communed with, and influenced, a diverse range of avant-garde and popular personalities and movements, as well as being a mass celebrity. In addition to her work as a dancer, Avril regularly appeared as an actress and was a well-respected member of the symbolist circle who met at the *café vachette*, whose regular clientele included the poet Jean Moréas (1856-1910), the director of the *théâtre d'art* Paul Fort (1872-1960), the novelist Villiers de l'Isle Adam (1838-1889), Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) and the movement's leader, the poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898). The café offered an experimental community where, as Mariel Oberthur has stated, 'young people could meet, mix freely [and] speak openly of politics and literature'. [3] There are few documented examples of female figures entering these environments as creative figures, rather than as muses for the artists, and Avril's involvement with this bohemian community suggests the ambiguous cultural position that she occupied. Her dance was a product of this amalgamation of the popular and the avant-garde; located at the intersection of mass entertainment and the experimental. This is illustrated by Avril's involvement in an 1897 production of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* that was directed by Fort at the *théâtre d'art,* in which she performed Anitra's Dance.

It is significant that Arthur Symons discarded his characteristic metaphors of passivity in his works that focused on Avril; instead his descriptions of her dance revolve around the effects created by her performance and a sense of anxiety evoked

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[3]Jean Grand-Carteret, cited in Mariel Oberthur, *Cafés and Cabarets of Montmartre* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1984), p. 12.

by the resulting vision of the empowered female dancer. This acknowledgement of Avril as a performer, albeit inherently eroticised, is significant; her dance demanded a new set of language of the poet. As has been previously noted, the work of the symbolist poet, Arthur Symons, offers access to the *fin-de-siècle* world of mass culture and locates the *danseuse* at the centre of a mapping of the geography of pleasure that shaped the modern city. Generally the *danseuse* acts as a dense poetic image, but the overt sexuality that is central to Symons's representation of the figure - and his obvious voyeuristic obsession with their performances that was suggested in the citation from his criticism of *Monkey Island* - can initially make his work difficult to engage with on a feminist (or even an objective) level.

Symons's poetry appears to be situated in a private world of fantasy that is partially founded upon contemporary ideas surrounding femininity, but also the result of his personal response to the figure of the unattainable, female celebrity. This characteristic combination is captured in Symons's responses to Jane Avril, primarily through his imagistic equation of the dancer with the mythical iconography of the transgressive woman, the *femme fatale.* This is illustrated clearly in his description of her on their first meeting, when he wrote, '[s]he had long black curls around her face; and had about her a depraved virginity'. [4] The conflicting vocabulary of purity and corruption and the dichotomous images of the virgin and the whore that are compounded in the notion of 'depraved virginity' suggests Avril's disruption of gender constructions through her celebrity image and her performance. The symbolic presence of the *femme fatale* pervades Symons's writings on Avril,

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[4]Cited in Karl Beckson, *Arthur Symons: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 107.

revealing an omnipresent sense of discomfort in his responses to her performance. This tension is partially explicated by his conclusion that, 'never in my experience of such women have I known anyone who had such an absolute passion for her own beauty.' [5] The inherent division that shaped Symons's reaction to Avril suggests that her stage image was constructed for her own satisfaction and pleasure, in contrast to constructions of the female popular performer as a one-dimensional image of femininity whose stage presence depended upon the pleasure of the viewer.

Symons's construction of a fantasy world around the female performers of the *fin de siècle* and the anxieties evoked by Avril's characteristic self-absorption converge in an 1892 entry in his memoirs that recounts a sexual encounter with the dancer one night after her performance at the *Moulin Rouge.* This extract from Symons's journal reveals the same presence of the iconography of the *femme fatale*, transposed from the symbolist poem and inscribed on to the offstage body of the female performer:

> [...] La Mélinite flung herself into my arms. We rejoined Lautrec and I finally went home with her: she lived not far from the Moulin Rouge. Famed as she was as a lesbian, she had an almost cruel passion for men. That night of all the nights I spent with her is one of my most memorable nights. There was nothing that girl could not do [...] At times she hardly breathed, she trembled all over, shivered, shuddered: rained her kisses on me as she embraced me: her mouth on mine that ached with heat. Then her hands seized my hands, she strained them as her lips sucked at my lips. Then, as they closed inextricably, her abandoned body that was abandoned to mine became rigid with sterile ecstasies, as one sudden shiver knitted my flesh with hers. Then she was deathless and divine, and equal flame-like with my fires. [...] Then, I know not how long after that, the fascinations of her flesh snared me, as Circe's snare men's souls – I breathed in a web of burning fire. [6]

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[5]Beckson, p. 106.
[6]Karl Beckson, ed., *The Memoirs of Arthur Symons: Life and Art in the 1890s* (University Park; London: Pennsylvania State University, 1977), p. 62 .

The language and imagery of this passage strongly suggests the pervasive influence of the contemporary urban myths of femininity on responses to performance. Furthermore, it is significant that Jane Avril is not individualised in this detailed intimate encounter, rather she remains the embodiment of her celebrity image - *La Mélinite* - to Symons. Symons's visions of Avril were tempered by his own interpretations of cultural representations of femininity.

In spite of this and his immersion in the fantasy world projected by the mass culture industry, Symons did recognise Avril as an autonomous performer and, consequently, as Catherine Ruth Robbins has commented, his poetry can also offer a positive angle for approaching the *danseuse*:

> The poetic persona is a *voyeur* as well as an actor of passion; and whilst the way he looks at the women he admires may be uncomfortable to say the least, his persona is also a frank admirer of the female artistry he observes; he takes pleasure from the artistic autonomy of the dancer. His attitude is rarely pure and never simple: for when the hyper-virile poet becomes a voyeur he is a passive (that is feminized) observer, and the woman who is watched becomes in turn active and empowered in a decadent reversal of gender hierarchy. [7]

Symons's recognition of the 'artistic autonomy' of the dancers that he focused on is central to an interpretation of the importance of his work. Creative agency was an attribute that was rarely recognised in the work of female popular stage performers and although Symons's dancers are sexualised to the extreme in his poetry, they are simultaneously active, artistic figures that are empowered by their movement. In addition to this, Robbins states that Symons located the effects of the dancer's art in the body and that, through this identification of embodiment, his poetry collated a

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[7]Catherine Ruth Robbins, 'Decadence and Sexual Politics in Three *Fin-de-Siècle* Writers: Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons and Vernon Lee' (unpublished thesis, 1996), p. 14.

set of language and descriptions that reinforced the centrality of corporeality to the female performer. [8]

Symons's poetry evokes similar tensions to any approach that centres the female body, be it theoretical or representational. However, as the characteristic themes of Symons's work reveal, in spite of these initial problems, engaging with the questions surrounding embodiment can also supply a productive way of thinking outside of gender constructions. Robbins's idea that mass culture placed the male spectator in a passive – and thus feminised – position suggests that his gaze was controlled and potentially manipulated by the dancer. This is important in both Avril's and Fuller's work where they used performance to complicate, multiply and disrupt their onstage image(s).

The notion of an inherent difficulty in representing Avril evinced by Symons's different style has also been identified by David Sweetman, who questioned whether one of Avril's nicknames, '*L'Étrange,* or the 'Strange One', best captures a woman on to whom everyone seems to have projected their own fantasies' [9] and by Avril's biographer, Jose Shercliff, who stated that the dancer's 'very strangeness roused strange desires, and drew men and women of all kinds round her like moths'. [10] It appears that the binaries of femininity and masculinity, 'High' and 'Low' culture, the irrational and the rational, insanity and reason were predominant metaphors in Jane Avril's work and that the disruption of the contemporary representation of the

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[8]Robbins, p. 138.
[9]David Sweetman, *Toulouse Lautrec and the Fin-de-Siècle* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1999), p. 268.
[10]Jose Shercliff, *Jane Avril of the Moulin Rouge* (London: Jarrolds, 1952), p.101.

female performer that their presence evoked solicited an individual response from the diverse audience members who watched her. The divergent nature of these reactions can be traced in visual representations of the dancer and her performance from the period.

The ambiguous location of Avril's dance between experimental performance and mass culture is encapsulated in contemporary representations of the dancer, where her recurrent appearance in visual culture makes her role as a cultural icon evident. The most famous of these images are the lithographs produced by Toulouse-Lautrec that feature the dancer, but Avril also appears in posters by Jules Chéret and Maurice Biais (who she later married). In addition to these advertising works that were a fundamental part of Avril's self-promotion as a celebrity, she is present as a background figure in the composition of many other of Lautrec's works and as the focus of less familiar paintings, such as 'Jane Avril Dancing' and 'Jane Avril Leaving the Moulin Rouge' (figures eight and nine). [11] These paintings, and to a lesser extent the posters, immortalised Toulouse-Lautrec's vision of Avril as a mournful and distracted figure, suggesting the complexity of Lautrec's relationship with her.

The atmosphere that Lautrec creates around the dancer in 'Jane Avril Dancing' (1892), suggests the sense of solipsistic absorption that was identified by Symons; the dancer is completely immersed in her performance to the exclusion of the

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[11]These images were the basis of a conference paper, 'Parisian Mass Culture, the Female Celebrity and the Entertainment Lithograph: *Fin-de-siècle* Questions of Corporeality', presented at 'The 1890s', University of Newcastle (July 2001).

gaze(s) of the painter and spectator. In 'Jane Avril Leaving the Moulin Rouge' (1893) the dancer is deliberately located outside of the performance space, in an attempt to expose the unglamorous elements of the *fin-de-siècle* entertainment industry. In the painting the celebrity is portrayed leaving the dance hall wrapped in a huge coat, clearly exhausted and overlooked by the other people on the street. In an evaluation of this set of images David Sweetman comments that, 'the contrast between Jane Avril's anonymous day clothes and her exotically plumed costumes neatly exemplifies the double life of one who wished to escape the depression of everyday existence in a world of glitter and movement'. [12] Lautrec's aim to represent the reality of the individual style and experience of the female performers he was acquainted with illustrates their ambiguous location in the *fin-de-siècle* city.

In contrast to this, early publicity photographs of Avril, such as figure ten, conformed more clearly to conventional understandings of femininity. The dancer's appearance certainly does not project the idea of a threatening level of self-absorption in this staged pose. The way that female celebrities shaped and maintained control over their image is an important element of Avril's and Fuller's roles as creative performers. The publicity photographs that were used by Jane Avril provide an angle on her understandings of the role of the modern celebrity, revealing a performer who was clearly aware of the industry of entertainment and the associated world of advertising. The juxtaposition of these visual representations of Avril reflects the dualistic approaches to femininity that shaped the *fin de siècle* and emphasise the indistinct aesthetic location that she occupied. Figure ten suggests

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[12]David Sweetman, *Toulouse-Lautrec and the Fin-de-Siècle* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), p. 360.

further how it was possible to use the arena of popular performance to subvert and disempower ideas surrounding gender: Avril adopts a simplistic image of femininity to market herself, but then disrupts it by performing indefinably; as Sweetman commented her audience did not share a response to the dancer.

Figure eight: Henri de Toulouse Lautrec, 'Jane Avril Dancing' (1892).

Figure nine: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, 'Jane Avril Leaving the Moulin Rouge' (1893).

Figure ten: Publicity photograph of Jane Avril (undated)

As established earlier, Jane Avril's main connection with the avant-garde was through her involvement with the symbolist movement. The relationship between the dancer and the aesthetic was dialectical, it consisted of the symbolists' interest in the figure of the *danseuse* and the correspondences between the group's artistic agenda and Avril's performance. The figure of the *danseuse* was a cardinal image in *fin-de-siècle* constructions of culture and gender and in the development of avant-garde aesthetics. The diverse nature of incarnations of the *danseuse* in contemporary art, literature and mythology reflects her centrality and reveals the contemporary tendency to fuse folklore, mythology and spiritualism in imagery that contends with social anxieties that is central to the urban myth.

The nineteenth-century fascination with Salomé within popular and experimental culture, which will be discussed further with reference to Loïe Fuller, reveals the location of the *danseuse* as a female form onto which social and spiritual anxieties could be projected. The ambiguous location of Jane Avril's performance can be extended to the figure of the *danseuse*, for she occupied a similar position between mass and avant-garde culture, adopted by the movements as an ideal symbol yet, in most cases, a popular stage performer. *Fin-de-siècle* descriptions of dancers convey the idea that they held a worrying power that enabled them to entrance the audience through their onstage presence, the combined result of their embodied femininity and their role in the consumer culture of the period.

A significant number of late nineteenth-century aesthetic theoreticians and practitioners, including the symbolists, considered dance to be the figurative representation of the total synthesis of the arts. Frank Kermode has stated that this *fin-de-siècle* understanding of dance, 'depend[ed] upon the assumption that mind and body, form and matter, image and discourse ha[d] undergone a process of dissociation, which it [was] the business of art to momentarily mend'. [13] This recognised need and desire for the reunification of aesthetic elements presupposes that the current artistic environment is inherently divided, at the *fin de siècle* this conviction reflected the dualistic approach that shaped the worlds of both art and society. The increase in the level of cultural prestige that was accorded to dance during the period was grounded in the belief that it 'represent[ed] art in an undisclosed and unspecialised form'. [14] These ideas, and their extension to establish the body of the *danseuse* as the site where art forms could coalesce, placed her in a problematic position. As a figure, the *danseuse* was at the core of the ideas surrounding modernist experimentation, but as an embodiment of a primitive or primeval force. The contemporary affiliation between understandings of femininity and dance is disclosed in this idea that dance was the unconscious expression of an aesthetic ideal and that the *danseuse's* body merely acted as the vehicle through which this timeless, instinctive force was manifested, precluding the possibility of reading her as a self-conscious experimental performer.

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[13]Frank Kermode, "Poet and Dancer before Diaghilev', in *Partisan Review* 28 (1961), 48-75 (p. 50).
[14]Kermode, p. 49.

This response to the *danseuse* was manifested by the work and aesthetic ideology of the Symbolist movement that Avril was affiliated with. Stéphane Mallarmé famously concluded that the dancer did not dance, a verb that suggests creative agency, rather that the artistic synthesis created through dance was a state of the soul, a language that expressed itself through the body of the performer. [15]

Relocating the focus of the exchange between Avril's performance and the Symbolists away from the movement's poetic and artistic images of the *danseuse* to the ways in which their aesthetic principles could be applied to Avril's aesthetic establishes the productive and dynamic relationship that is evinced in Symons's symbolist response to Avril and his conviction that she fulfilled the role of an autonomous performer.

Late nineteenth-century understandings of the *danseuse* that locate her performance as a transformation into the symbol of the synthesis of art appear to be partially the result of the tension between late nineteenth-century polarised concepts of the spiritual and the embodied. On the occasions when these ideological boundaries are dismissed, as in the poetry of Symons inspired by Avril, the artistic creativity of the female performer can be acknowledged. It is important to note here that the aesthetic incarnations and understandings of the *danseuse,* and their implicit link with anxieties surrounding women, were not necessarily a generalised representation of contemporary social ideas. In *Paris Dansant*, published in 1898, the social commentator, George Montorgueil, stated that in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, '[l]es étoiles de danse ont été consultées comme les patrons de musettes' (the stars of the dance are

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[15]A. G. Lehmann, *The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, 1885-1895* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), p. 237.

consulted in the same way as patrons of music).[16] Montorgueil's statement conveys society's belief in the autonomous performance of the *fin-de-siècle* dancer, for why would a figure who merely acted as a vehicle for the unconscious transmission of an aesthetic ideal have been consulted on aesthetic matters? This returns to the idea of the arena of mass culture supplying a liberating urban space for the female performer and, particularly in this case for the *danseuse,* an arena where she could escape her aesthetic ideal and achieve recognised creative agency. These *fin-de-siècle* ideas that question the possibility of an autonomous female performer contain the origins of understandings of essentialism that have framed responses to the early development of modern dance.

The Circle and the sphere: essentialism, eroticism and the *danseuse*

> [T]he body, dancing, can challenge and deconstruct cultural inscriptions [...]. In moments of dancing the edges of things blur and terms such as mind / body, flesh / spirit, carnal / divine, male / female become labile and unmoored, breaking loose from the fixings of their pairings. [17]

Elizabeth Dempster's statement on modern dance, cited both above and in the introduction to this thesis, supplies a typical example of much of the early writing on the form. These approaches are characterised by their conviction that the movement involved in dance offered a temporary source of creative expression and liberation for the performer from the restraints imposed by gender constructs, but in a way that

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16'The stars of the dance are consulted in the same way as the patrons of music'. Although contemporary translations of 'musette' offer accordion music, making Montorgueil's comment seem potentially ironic, it is clear from the nature of the text that the author's understanding of the dancer was as an autonomous female performer. Georges Montorgueil, *Paris Dansant,* (Paris: Libraire L. Conquet, 1897), p. vi.

17Elizabeth Dempster, cited in Janet Wolff, 'Dance Criticism: Feminism, theory and choreography', in *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance,* ed. by Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 242.

often revolved too explicitly around the contemporary images associated with the ideal feminine. The binaries that Dempster lists are those that framed nineteenth-century social thought and the problematic question of what occurs in the undefined space that exists between them can be traced in critical writing on dance. In the nineteenth-century, however, these liminal spaces were generally interpreted as transgressive: as examples of the same potential to evade classification that was encapsulated in the fear provoked by the *femme fatale*. The spaces located between the ideological binaries of the *fin de siècle* were imagined in terms of sexuality and danger.

Jane Avril's location within the undefined spaces between 'High' and 'Low' culture and the spiritual aestheticism of the Symbolists and the sexualised embodiment of the popular stage performer is conveyed through Arthur Symons's accounts of her performance. These also included a poem that recounted the effect of her dancing, 'La Mélinite: Moulin Rouge':

La Mélinite: Moulin Rouge

Olivier Metra's Waltz of Roses
  Sheds in a rhythmic shower
  The very petals of the flower;
And all its roses,
  The rouge of petals in a shower.

Down the long hall the dance returning
  Rounds the full circle, rounds
  The perfect rose of lights and sounds,
The rose returning
  Into the circle of its rounds.

Alone, apart, one dancer watches
 Her mirrored, morbid grace;
 Before the mirror, face to face,
Alone she watches
 Her morbid, vague, ambiguous grace.

Before the mirror's dance of shadows
 She dances in a dream,
 And she and they together seem
A dance of shadows;
 Alike the shadows of a dream.

The orange-rosy lamps are trembling
 Between the robes that turn;
 In ruddy flowers of flame that burn
The lights are trembling:
 The shadows and the dancers turn.

And, enigmatically smiling,
 In the mysterious night,
 She dances for her own delight,
A shadow smiling
 Back to a shadow in the night. [18]

Symons's poem revolves around the image of the circle, a recurrent motif of femininity in *fin-de-siècle* artistic and literary representations of women and is endemic to ideas surrounding essentialism. In his study, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle Culture*, Bram Dijkstra identifies the circular form as central to the nineteenth-century's visual codes of femininity:

> The symbol of woman, the self-contained round, the uroboros, began to appear with increasing frequency in turn-of-the-century art. [...] She was encompassed, decoratively or "organically" or both, by an endless variety of circles which crowded around her in the form of garlands, wreaths, and swirls of cloth, or even in the form of a mundane "tub" – that ubiquitous tool of feminine toiletry which in its convenient circularity made a symbolic statement about the inscrutable self-contained nature of women. [19]

Dijkstra develops his ideas to encompass the frequent use of the mirror and the act

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[18]Arthur Symons, 'La Mélinite: Moulin Rouge' in *Arthur Symons: Poetry and Prose*, ed. by R. V. Holdsworth (Cheadle: Carcanet, 1974), pp.41-2.
[19]Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle* Culture (Oxford: Oxford University, 1986), p. 129.

of a woman studying her reflection as metaphorical representations of the self-containment of women and questions of female identity: 'her womanhood was a source of continual fascination to her. To see herself was her only hold on reality'.[20] Dijkstra's immediate reference is to the use of water as a natural mirror in fine art, but his argument can be productively extended to consider the use of large-scale mirrors to decorate the venues of mass culture. These mirrors were examples of the way that the technology of modernity offered new ways of creating interior environments and of reflecting light and colour. The focus on the complex relationship between identity, self-absorption and autoeroticism that is contained within the image(s) of the mirror can be productively considered alongside Symons's poetic recreation of Avril's performance, 'La Mélinite: Moulin Rouge'. What Symons's poem reveals is the extent to which the cultural understanding of the circular form, and its relationship with physical and spiritual conceptions of female sexuality, affected interpretations of and reactions to the work of female performers.[21]

The inherent connection between the circle and the erotic was also the result of the artistic convention of containing metaphorical representations of ideal femininity within circular objects that were associated with the spaces of the private sphere. The work of Edgar Degas (1834-1917) supplies a useful, if frequently cited, example

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[20]Dijkstra, p. 132.

[21]The recurrent use of the circle as a symbolic representation of nineteenth-century female sexuality was partially the result of the organicism of its form. The association between organicism and femininity evolved during the century, culminating with the Art Nouveau movement, whose practitioners depended on the sinuous lines offered by the curvatures of the female body of the genre, an idea that will be discussed in further detail in relation to the work of Loïe Fuller.

of this tradition. Degas recurrently depicted women bathing in his paintings, employing the circular form of the bathtub to echo the curves of the female form. This can be seen clearly in figure eleven, an 1884 painting entitled, 'Woman in the Tub'.

The location of the female form within the private sphere that is evident in the work of Degas suggests a form of surreptitious entrapment. The female subject of the painting is seen relaxing in the luxuries and the comfort of the domestic space, seemingly unaware of the intrusive male gaze of the painter. It also implies that the metaphor of the circle is constructed on at least two layers, for the woman is not

Figure eleven: Edgar Degas, 'Woman in the Tub' (1884).

only framed in the immediately evident circle of the bathtub, she is also encircled by the ideologies and the fantasies that have constructed contemporary understandings

of the domestic sphere. The self-absorption of these women, conveyed in this example through the unawareness of the gaze by Degas's woman in the tub, results in the spectator becoming a voyeur, a violator of the private space. It is not possible to claim that Degas's female figure is rejecting the gaze through her self-absorption, as it is made clear that she is intended to be oblivious of its presence.

Through this access to these normally restricted private and domestic spaces, the viewer is offered a sense of temporarily possessing the women who are portrayed in a space that would normally be denied to them, for even in the marital home the husband would generally not be present during the rituals of dressing and undressing. In these settings the women portrayed are devoid of the costume, accessories and the self-performative elements that constitute femininity under the scrutiny of the public gaze, resulting in their being in a vulnerable position. Woman's freedom to consider herself in private, in the space where she would normally de-robe herself of the physical constructs of the feminine image, is translated into the fantasies of voyeurism in these paintings. In these terms it is unsurprising that the circle of the bathing tub, or the mirror, or the form of the female body itself became a visual signifier of sexuality, fantasy and desire.

Generally circular, enclosed images – such as those contained in visual art and those that shape Arthur Symons's poem on Avril - have been read as iconic reflections of gender ideology: either as metaphors of the idealised Angel of the House or of the dangerous erotic self-absorption of the *femme fatale* that is evident in Symons's

representation of Jane Avril as a threatening figure. As with all understandings of the dominant imagery of femininity at the *fin de siècle*, however, the use of the circle as a visual signifier was not without its tensions and the system of collectively understood visual codes offered a level of subversion to nineteenth-century women, through the adoption of these signifiers. If the organicism of the circle was affiliated with the mythologisation of the private space as a site of combined femininity and eroticism, then subverting its established visual codes could de-mythologize it. The function of the domestic sphere within contemporary social ideology was as a sanctuary for men, a space that was free from the encroaching technology and commodity culture of the modern city. As a marital environment it was ideally to be devoid of active sexuality, with physical relations restricted solely to those necessary for the propagation of the family. This immediately suggests the inherent limitations and tensions involved in the ideological attempt to classify the domestic sphere, what happens, for example, when the domestic interior was the home of the single woman, or the female consumer or performer who herself entered the public areas of the city during the day or night and returned to the domestic sphere in the same way as a man?

Although Jane Avril's characteristic solipsism could be interpreted as an impenetrable narcissistic circle between dancer and self that to some extent rejected the possibility the intrusion of a voyeuristic spectatorial gaze it is also clear that Arthur Symons found this element of her performance an inherently sexual, autoerotic and - for the poet – a deeply attractive element of her personality and her

performance. The idea of distance and sexual unavailability that was suggested by Avril's study of her corporeal self in the mirror as she moved was sexually arousing for Symons and his difficulty in distinguishing between personality and performance is important. It is interesting to link this to the symbolist aesthetic, which used a series of personal symbols and expression that were deciphered by reader, or the spectator in the case of symbolist theatre. Symons's read Avril's solipsism as sexuality, but this can be interpreted as simply being in line with contemporary gender ideology: the result of interpretations of her work and not her creative intention.

The complexity of the imagery and the tensions that were evoked by the circle at the *fin de siècle* is suggested in Symons's poetic vision of Avril. Symons adopts this conventional motif of femininity and eroticism, but places it in the public, transgressive space of the dance hall. This raises the question of what happens to the metaphorical power of this established symbol when the space in which it occurs is the antithesis of the domestic, for example the public arena of mass culture. In addition to this, circular representations of femininity in visual art revolve around the woman being a passive figure who is framed by the shape. Conversely, the constant movement of Avril's dance created an ever-changing sequence of circles that were formed and controlled by her own physicality. This incorporation of one of the central codes of femininity suggests the use of gender ideology in order to subvert and disempower it. If this could work with the visual imagery of the circle then it suggests that it could also disrupt the core ideas of essentialism that it

represented.

As Janet Wolff has noted one argument has unified the majority of approaches to early modern dance: the conviction that *fin-de-siècle* dance offered a degree of liberation to the female performer. Wolff locates the emergence of this idea at the end of the nineteenth century, synchronous with the advent of modernism: '[t]his equation operates especially in relation to gender. It is women's dancing, more than men's that symbolises their desired or imminent social liberation'. [22] Wolff's main criticism of this approach to the relationship between dance and women is that it seems to have been simply absorbed into understandings of the form, not questioned or justified. She notes that the concept is so pervasive that metaphorical images of dance have been adopted to represent creativity and liberation throughout the theoretical field of cultural studies:

> Dancing may well be liberating, and the metaphor of dance may sometimes capture the sense of circumventing dominant modes of rationality. But my concern about this particular trope is that it depends on a mistaken idea of dance as intuitive, non-verbal, natural, and that it risks abandoning critical analysis for a vague and ill-conceived 'politics of the body'. [23]

What Wolff highlights here is the infiltration of *fin-de-siècle* assumptions about dance, femininity and instinct into academic approaches to dance, threatening their objectivity and subscribing to an inherently gendered theoretical substructure. The image of modern dance as a timeless, intuitive system of movement has been conveyed through the culture references that surround the work of early modern

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[22]Wolff, p. 241.
[23]Wolff, p. 241.

female dancers. The work of Isadora Duncan is repeatedly associated with ancient Greek civilisations and Loïe Fuller described her work as affiliated with the Old Testament dancing of Miriam and Salomé. The inherent implication of these links is that, in the late nineteenth-century, dance was completely detached from the immediate social conditions in which it was created. The consideration of experimental performance in the arena of mass culture, however, makes this approach untenable. The nature of the performance spaces, the marketing industry surrounding the performers, the lighting and staging technologies and the complex use of costume that were involved in the dance of Avril and Fuller were the product of the *fin de siècle* and locate their performances in a specific historical moment. Furthermore, as chapter five will explore, Fuller had a particularly complex relationship with the creative process of her dance that was partially shaped by her attempt to renegotiate what society expected of women and performers. When the experimental early modern dance of Avril and Fuller is located in its immediate social context, and in a dynamic relationship with the late nineteenth-century birth of the female celebrity, it is possible to discover some discourses of liberation on the popular stage.

While admitting the role of early modern dance as a form that seemingly offered a degree of liberation from 'dominant modes of rationality', critical responses to early modern dance have ranged from a celebration of the form as a creative outlet for a non-linguistic, and thus relatively non-patriarchal, means of expression to a condemnation of its adoption of the ideas that surrounded idealised concepts of

femininity and the body. Feminist scholars in the field of dance studies have typically acknowledged that the *fin-de-siècle* female performer's intention was to subvert contemporary constructions of femininity to some degree. However, as her work drew upon the concept of a natural female essence it ultimately only reinforced essentialist ideas surrounding gender. This concludes with a theoretical impasse, resulting from a retrospective discomfort with this seeming level of acceptance of the dualism of masculine/feminine. In recent years as work in the field of early modern dance has begun to be approached within the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies, it has benefited from the input of theoretical developments surrounding the understanding of social constructions of the body and performance history. This approach is particularly helpful when considering the work of Jane Avril, whose performance and image were partially shaped by a psychological illness and the resulting period of time that she spent in the *Salpetrière* hospital in Paris. *Fin-de-siècle* representations of madness revolved around its perceived link with femininity; a reflection of the rational/irrational extension of the masculine/feminine duality: images of insanity were inscribed on to the female body.

Insanity: creative liberation in transgressive spaces?

The link between women and insanity forms one of the *fin-de-siècle* urban myths that evolved as an attempt to classify femininity and the cultural image of the madwoman pervades the dichotomous representations of women as good and evil,

encapsulated in the physically frail woman and the *pétroleuse* discussed in chapter two. During the period madness was employed as a social tool to exclude women who threatened to dispute, and thus potentially to disprove, the dominant dualistic constructs of gender. Kerry Powell has identified a frequent connection between insanity and representations of the late nineteenth-century female actress, noting that myths of madness operated as a means of marginalizing the figure and containing her transgression within medical discourses: 'the actress as madwoman was framed in a rhetoric of pathology that both monitored and disarmed her social potential'. [24] The preoccupation with female corporeality that was expressed in the anxieties surrounding the female performer and the popular stage further emphasises the links between women, irrationality and the physical. Theoretical approaches in early psychology were characterised by the general scientific acceptance that mental and bodily health were inseparable. In addition to the ideological association between women and the irrational, the conjunction of women and the corporeal in contemporary thought located femininity as the obvious focus for discussions and representations of insanity.

The inherent affiliation of dance, the quintessential female art form of the late nineteenth century, and madness was founded in contemporary gender constructions. The question of this connection with insanity re-emphasises the problematic theoretical location of dance, for if, as Wolff has stated, early modern dance supplied a means of circumventing dominant modes of rationality then, in a society that depended on binary oppositions for its system of social classification, it would have

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[24]Kerry Powell, *Women in the Victorian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997), p. 38.

been aligned with the irrational by default. Furthermore, the *fin-de-siècle* connections between femininity and the irrational and dance and the irrational results in this theoretical hurdle raising a new set of questions that surround female performers and essentialism. On this occasion these are not concerned with the adoption of the visual codes of femininity and the organic, but with the social link between women and irrational modes of representation and expression. The unique nature of Jane Avril's experience of psychological illness does, however, offer an avoidance of some of these questions and contemporary ideas surrounding insanity and femininity can be productively explored in relation to the influences that her psychological illness had on Avril: physically; psychologically; emotionally and practically.

Frank Kermode identifies the idiosyncratic blend of poetry and pathology in Jane Avril's performance style as the factor that secured its popularity. [25] He develops his argument to suggest that the influence of the period of time she spent at the *Salpetrière*, combined with her lingering psychological condition, makes it possible to interpret her dance through the language of disease: as a visible series of unconscious effects that could be traced by watching the movement of Avril's body in performance. Kermode's interest in the *danseuse* as a central poetic image of the *fin-de-siècle* symbolist movement is clear in this reading that subscribes to the idea of dance as an instinctive art form. It is useful here to extend Kermode's theoretical link between poetry and pathology further, to encompass the realm of popular performance, where the intrinsic affiliation that he draws between Avril and

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[25]Kermode, p. 49.

madness can be explored through her performance style the ways in which she appropriated the discourses of insanity to shape her celebrity image.

As the daughter of a famous second empire courtesan, Elise Richepin, Avril had endured a difficult childhood during which her mother repeatedly tried to force her into prostitution. Elise Richepin was no longer the young, beautiful woman she had been at the height of her popularity during the Second Empire and she had retained only a few clients, she took her frustration at her situation out on her daughter and was frequently violent towards her. Jane's domestic situation degenerated further and eventually she ran away from home. One of her mother's previous clients took her in, recognised that she was unwell and called a psychologist to examine her. Jane was diagnosed as suffering from a condition commonly known as 'St. Vitus's Dance', now referred to as Huntingdon's or Sydenham's Chorea. [26] At the advice of the psychologist, Jane Avril was admitted to the *Salpetrière* hospital in Paris, where she stayed from December 1882 to June 1884. The *Salpetrière* was the largest and most renowned psychiatric hospital in the nineteenth-century world with patient numbers fluctuating around five thousand. It was also the home of the renowned Hysteric, a figure that publicly displayed the association between women and madness at the *fin de siècle.*

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[26]Sydenham's Chorea was identified in the seventeenth century by the English physician Thomas Sydenham (1624-1689). Its most obvious symptom is involuntary muscular twitches of the face and body. The onset of St Vitus's Dance was understood to be related to either a pre-existing neurological condition or to the repeated experience of extreme levels of stress and the nineteenth-century therapeutic approach revolved around calming the patient with sedatives and protecting them from any level of nervous excitement. Sydenham's choice of terminology for the illness is revealing, as chorea is the ancient Greek word for dance. Although this is partially linked to the erratic twitching associated with the condition it also reinforces the links between dance and madness, indeed St Vitus's Dance formed a part of the group of 'dancing manias' that were of great interest to *fin-de-siècle* psychologists.

When Jane Avril entered the *Salpetrière* Hospital, she was placed on the same ward as the hysterics, even though she was still classified as a child on her admission to the institution and that she had not been diagnosed with the disease. The reasons for this are unclear, although it did mean that she was under the direct care of Jean Martin Charcot (1825-1893). Charcot was the leading figure in the study of hysteria, a condition that had attracted his interest when he arrived at the *Salpetrière* as a junior doctor in 1862. [27] One of his earliest tasks at the institution was to differentiate between a group of patients at the hospital who had previously been placed on wards together: the psychotics, the epileptics and the hysterics. Accounts of the technique that Charcot employed to achieve this end are revealing: according to a contemporary report, in order to diagnose the nature of each patient's individual illness he ' would have the patients brought into his office and stripped naked; he would observe them, ask them to perform certain movements, stare, meditate and then have them led out'. [28] Aside from direct instructions to the patient, there was no verbal communication between the doctor and the patient, the nature of the psychological condition was determined by a close reading of the body.

The reduction of the psychological condition to corporeal symptoms that characterised Charcot's approach was applied to male patients as well as to female and it is important to acknowledge that Charcot also believed in male hysteria. A significant amount of his work concerning the disease, however, acted to reinforce

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[27]Charcot also had a particular interest in conditions that were related to Chorea and the other dancing manias of the *fin de siècle.* Frank Kermode has commented on the importance of the terminology and understanding of dance to Charcot's work on hysteria, suggesting that his interstating that Jane Avril 'seems to have reproduced some of the symptoms of hysterical dancing [...] combining certain powerful aesthetic and pathological interests of the period'.
[28]Georges Guillain (Charcot's biographer), paraphrased in Martha Noel Evans, Evans, *Fits and Starts: A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University, 1991), p. 20.

the contemporary ideological affiliation of women, corporeality and madness. In 1881, the year before Avril's institutionalisation, Charcot had been promoted to Professor of Neuropathology. At this time the primary aim of his research was to prove that the hysterical condition was rooted in the physiology of the patient and that it could thus be controlled through the treatment of the body. Charcot's hypothesis resulted in his experimentation with a range of therapies in the attempt to identify the physical locus of the hysteric attack. These included the isolated compression of certain areas of the body (particularly the ovaries, for which a specific belt was produced), extended periods of immersion in cold-water baths and electrotherapy. Charcot's range of treatments, especially that of ovarian compression, meant that, in spite of his recognition of male hysterical patients, generally it was considered to be a female condition. As Roy Porter has noted, in the late nineteenth century, '[h]ysteria came to be seen as the open sesame to impenetrable riddles of existence: religious ecstasy, sexual deviation and above all, that mystery of mysteries, woman.'. [29] This notion was reinforced by the nature of the Tuesday afternoon lectures that Charcot instigated at the *Salpetrière* and the way that he recorded the female hysterical patients under his care.

As has previously been stated it was women who represented hysteria and madness in the *fin-de-siècle* popular consciousness. This was the result of the convergence of archaic images of femininity and madness and contemporary ideas and discursive practices, such as those identified by Powell and the display of the hysterics in the

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[29]Roy Porter, 'The Body and the Mind, the Doctor and the Patient', in *Hysteria Beyond Freud'*, ed. by Sander Gilman, Helen King, Roy Porter, G. S. Rousseau and Elaine Showalter (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California, 1993), p. 227.

work of Charcot. Under the directorship of Charcot the female hysterics of the *Salpetrière* became renowned figures across Paris, primarily as a result of the hospital's Tuesday afternoon open lecture programme. Axel Munthe, a Swedish physician who visited Paris in the late nineteenth century noted that the audience at these events was 'multicoloured', constituted of 'tout Paris, authors, journalists, leading actors and actresses, fashionable demimondaines'.[30] During these sessions Charcot would hypnotise his female patients in order to provoke an hysteric attack that could be demonstrated to the public.[31] Munthe's account of one such display emphasises the link between the hospital's lecture programme and the desire to entertain:

> Some of them [the hysterics] smelt with delight a bottle of ammonia when told it was rose water, others would eat a piece of charcoal when presented to them as chocolate. Another would crawl on all fours on the floor, barking furiously when told she was a dog, flap her arms as if trying to fly when turned into a pigeon, lift her skirts with a shriek of terror with a suggestion of a snake. [32]

The *Salpetrière* represents the entry of medicine and psychiatry into the arena of mass culture at the *fin de siècle*. The female patients of the institution were placed in the role of performers, in front of a diverse – not exclusively medical or scientific – audience. In this way they represented two incarnations of transgressive femininity: the madwoman and the performer. Furthermore, Charcot's displays

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[30]Axel Munthe, cited in Elaine Showalter, 'Hysteria, Feminism and Gender', in Gilman et al., (309-32), p. 311.
[31]In her study of hysteria, *Fits and Starts: A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France*, Martha Noel Evans writes of Charcot's Tuesday afternoon lectures, commenting that, 'even Jane Avril, Toulouse-Lautrec's famous poster subject, [was a visitor] at these demonstrations'. Evans supplies a clear example of the way that Avril has been written out of the performance history of late nineteenth-century France: for here there is no reference to the dancer in her own right as a performer, simply as one of Lautrec's models. The account also suggests a sense of surprise that Avril can be affiliated with a list of cultural figures that included Bergson, Durkheim and Bernhardt, even though Avril mixed with the aesthetic communities in the city. Furthermore, Evans makes no reference to Avril's links with the hospital as a patient.
[32]Gilman et al, p. 311.

were concurrent with the popular enthusiasm for mesmerism as a form of mass entertainment. In a statement that echoes the fictional case of Svengali's hypnotic control of Trilby, Georges Gilles de la Tourette, a student and a colleague of Charcot, stated that, 'from the moment [the hysteric] is hypnotized, she belongs to us'. [33] The popularity of Trilby and the metaphor of hypnosis and the current fashion of the mesmerist unites psychology and entertainment, questioning the boundaries between the masculine scientific world and the feminine environment of mass culture.

The centrality of the female hysteric to understandings of spectacle and performance – an extension of the inherent link between women and madness - also forms the primary reason for the male hysteric's failure to capture the public's imagination. As was established earlier, Charcot had identified male hysteria, but the individuals who experienced it have been virtually excluded from popular and academic historical reconstructions of this period of the history of psychology. Elaine Showalter illustrates this tendency in her discussion of the figure of the 'Wild Man' Lap...sonne, a male hysteric who was:

> covered with symbolic tattoos, such as a veiled woman he called "the night", and earned his living eating live rabbits in fairs. But while Blanche Wittman became the "Queen of the Hysterics" performing at the Salpetrière clinic, Lap...sonne is remembered only as a case study. [34]

These ideas reveal a clear association between the understandings of femininity and insanity fostered by the *Salpetrière* hospital and the discursive practices that

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[33]Cited in Evans, p. 37.
[34]Showalter, p. 309.

emerged as a result of the explicitly visual focus of mass culture. Roy Porter has defined the relationship between hysteria, performance and the gaze as an essential element of the condition, stating that, 'hysteria was a condition chiefly rendered visible by the medical presence'. [35] In the case of the *Salpetrière*, however, the gaze(s) that the hysteric formed the locus of were not solely medical and the diversity of the audience reveals a site where the dualities of *fin-de-siècle* culture converged: the scientific (masculine) community shared their spectatorial position with the world of mass culture, and its feminine classification. The intersections of early psychiatry and performance have been the subject of significant critical attention in recent years, particularly with reference to the role that was played by the *fin-de-siècle* hysteric. This reading of the hysteric is not simply a retrospective approach to the condition, as similar questions surrounding the nature of her condition were raised in the nineteenth century. This is exemplified in the notes of a contemporary scientist, Robert Carter, who concluded 'that nature knew no such being as a solitary hysteric: hysteria was a public complaint presupposing an audience – mass hysteria definitionally so'. [36]

Avril's experience of the *Salpetrière* hospital was not that of a hysteric, however, and her location on the hysteric ward, whilst remaining exempt from that diagnosis, allowed her to appropriate the myths engendered by the hospital's renowned environment. In this institutionalised site of insanity, that had concurrently been preordained as a sphere of performance, Avril appears to have initiated a set of

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[35]Porter, 242.
[36]Porter, 242.

creative ideas that appropriated and subverted contemporary discourses and images of femininity. Furthermore, the particular constructions of performance and display that were propagated by the *Salpetrière* hospital and the hysterics are at the core of an understanding of Jane Avril's understanding of performance and negotiation of celebrity, especially when they are considered in conjunction with the centrality of the female body to early psychiatric diagnosis and procedure. Public displays of madness at the *fin de siècle* strengthened the social conceptions of femininity and insanity and influenced ideas surrounding women, self-absorption and performance, however, Jane Avril's experiences at the *Salpetrière* offer an alternative response to this complex relationship.

This response is documented in Avril's reaction to the other female patients whom she spent time with, particularly the stars of hysteria. As Bonduelle and Gelfand have stipulated, Jane Avril's memoirs of her time at the *Salpetrière* supply an:

> [...] unvarnished testimony of the daily life of the women with hysteria among whom she lived. She wrongly accuses them of simulation. But she accurately portrays the rivalry of the 'crazy girls' who vied to become the center of attention, and she sheds light on the factors that came together to make hysteria contagious (she herself escaped). [37]

Avril's memoirs are characterised by their objectivity, although it is important to acknowledge that they were written much later in her life and were shaped partially by the emotional distance offered by this hindsight. It is evident from Avril's writings on the period of time that she spent at the hospital that she did not consider herself to be insane, particularly in comparison to the hysterics, or the 'crazies' as

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[37]Michel Bonduelle and Toby Gelfand, 'Hysteria Behind the Scenes: Jane Avril at the Salpêtrière', *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences*, 7:1 (1998), 35-42 (p. 35).

she referred to them, that she shared a ward with. Rather, Avril used the *Salpetrière* as a refuge from the instability and violence of her home environment, a space in which to shape her identity. This notion is supported by her memoirs where she recounts the details of her time at the hospital in language that initially appears incongruous with the record of a stay in a psychiatric institution: Avril referred to the hospital as her 'Eden', self-consciously defending this position with the statement that, ' [...] it was for me, so much in this world being relative'. [38] In addition to the positive psychological effects that the environment of the *Salpetrière* had on Jane Avril, it was during her period of treatment at the institution that she discovered her talent for and connection with dance. The hospital had instigated an educational programme for its younger patients, which incorporated both academic lessons and an emphasis on bodily health and fitness, including gymnastics classes. Later descriptions of Avril's performance style, which included movements such as the fan, where the dancer stood on one leg with the other extended straight up in front of her, clasped in front of her face, while her coloured skirts cascaded around her like a fan, reveal how she had incorporated the flexibility and physical control that formed the basis of these classes into the agility of her dance. Avril was also taught the basic rudiments of dance by one of the older patients who had been a professional performer prior to her time in the hospital.

Avril's account of the period of time that she spent at the *Salpetrière* contains an explicit dismissal of the hysterics who became the main feature of the hospital. In her memoirs she labelled them as, the 'stars of hysteria, an ailment, which, at that

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[38]Bonduelle and Gelfand, p. 37.

time was creating a sensation'. [39] Avril was not alone in this sense of suspicion of the *Salpetrière's* most famous inmates. A significant proportion of the late nineteenth-century scientific community were distrustful of the reality of the complaint. Hysteria was often quantified in terms of an excess of the qualities of femininity interpreted as negative, exemplified in the focus on fickleness and an inability to control passion. Furthermore, there is a second level to Avril's descriptions that draws upon the ideas of performance, and its affiliation with femininity and hysteria, '[t]here were those deranged girls whose ailment named Hysteria consisted, above all, in simulation of it [...] How much trouble they used to go to in order to capture attention and gain stardom'. [40] Through her observation of the hysterics at the *Salpetrière,* Jane Avril witnessed one example of what she considered to be a self-constructed performance identity. Her journals reflect later thought on the hysterical condition, such as Martha Noel Evans's understanding of the late nineteenth-century incarnation of 'hysterical performance': '[d]esirious of attention, it seems at almost any price, hysterics appeared to be playing their audience, almost enjoying their symptoms. In these circumstances, the ordinary distinctions between reality and fiction became blurred.' [41]

Jane Avril's lack of compassion towards the hysterics whom she shared a ward with has been commented on by both of her biographers Jose Shercliff and Francois Caradec and in an article, written by Michel Bonduelle and Toby Gelfand, that focuses solely on her period of interment at the *Salpetrière.* In spite of their

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[39]Bonduelle and Gelfand, p. 37.
[40]Bonduelle and Gelfand, p. 37.
[41]Evans, p. 32.

different approaches, all three of these studies reveal a noteworthy similarity in their documentation of this period of Avril's life, characterized by the interpretation of her honest, and sometimes barbed, comments as a surprising lack of solidarity on her part. In his recent biography of the dancer Caradec, for instance, surmised that she observed, and later documented, this new, curious world with a degree of unkind mischief. [42] The implicit questions that are raised in these biographical accounts are more interesting than those based on a simple assumption of jealousy or of teenage misunderstanding, what links them is the assumption (on the part of the authors as much as anyone else) that the wards of the *Salpetrière* hospital induced some sense of female solidarity that Avril transgressed. This appears to be the result of the combination of romanticised images and the retrospective celebration of the hysteric as a figure of resistance, rather than any historically based understanding of the hospital environment.

What Jane Avril perceived and documented in the behaviour of the *grandes hysteriques* was their ability to perform and to self-consciously manipulate the gaze(s) of an audience. This audience was formed not only of the spectators at Charcot's Tuesday lectures, but also contained the very intimate and specialised spectatorship made up of the hospital's team of psychiatric specialists. The meretriciousness Avril identifies in the hysterics inadvertently reveals an interesting aspect of her ideas surrounding the nature of performance. The deceit that she envisaged as being central to the existence of the hysterics was a type of

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[42] 'Elle est quinze ans, elle est heureuse, et elle observe avec malice ce curieux monde', François Caradec, *Jane Avril au Moulin Rouge avec Toulouse-Lautrec* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2001), p. 21.

performance that Avril neither approved of nor respected. As she stated, '[f]or me it was a comic show to see these crazies come away so proud and delighted to have been chosen and pointed to by the "master"'. [43] This rejection of the primary aim of performance being to please the eye of the spectator became a key element of Avril's experimentation in dance and performance.

Further investigation of Avril's memoirs of the period reveals that her age and her lack of star status offered her a feeling of invisibility, for, '[t]hese patients [the hysterics] had nothing to hide from little me - I was of so little consequence'. [44] This links back to central ideas of looking / gazes. 'it is miraculous that such abnormal surroundings did not have a deep-rooted influence on the child's whole future life. With her lively imagination, her sensitiveness these years of close association with every form of madness and abnormality might have warped and twisted her nature irreparably. Jeanne, however, had a remarkable facility for accepting life without question'. [45]

Significantly, Jane Avril's first performance in front of an audience occurred at the *Salpetrière*, at a costume ball organised to celebrate the eve of Mi-Careme (the festival of the end of Lent traditionally marked by a series of revels). These events at the hospital were not restricted to the inmates of the institution; instead they became part of the city's social calendar and, as Shercliff notes, invitations were sent

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[43]Cited in Bonduelle and Gelfand, 37.
[44]Bonduelle and Gelfand, p. 37.
[45]Shercliff, pp. 44-5.

out to the metropolis's famous artists, scholars, sculptors, actors and scientists. [46] This diverse audience not only reflects the fashionable status of the hospital, but it also makes it clear that Avril's first experience of public performance was not within an intimate or sheltered environment, rather it occurred as part of a large-scale public event: the ball, and the Tuesday afternoon lectures, were inherently linked with the diversity of metropolitan gazes that characterised the *fin-de-siècle* venues of popular culture.

Avril's recollection of the ball suggests that it acted as a moment of apotheosis, a brief period of time during which she was conscious of her transition from a girl to a woman. Her verbal account of the evening, recounted by Shercliff, reveals the feeling of empowerment that she gained from this first public performance. This response forms an important element in the understandings of sexuality and embodiment that shaped her later dance style:

> The greatest moment of the evening came when the orchestra struck up a valse for which she had no partner. She was standing alone [...] At the first notes of the rhythm something seemed to wake in her. She felt a tingling feeling run through her limbs and a strange, excited happiness surged into her heart to make her pulse beat quicker and her breathing lighter. Almost unconsciously she began to dance alone [...] One by one the dancers began to notice her, to draw aside, then to fall out of the dance. Enchanted and amazed they watched her rapt face, the perfect movements of her feet and hands. Then suddenly she was aware of what had happened. [47]

The self-conscious nature of the comment that Avril chose to express the effect that this first performance had on her develops this further: 'Helas! soupire Jane Avril, je

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[46]Shercliff, p. 49.
[47]Shercliff, p. 50.

fus guerie' (Alas! Sighed Jane Avril, I was cured). [48] She was discharged from the *Salpetrière* during the following week, suggesting that the public performance of her dance – and the response to it – had crystallised the healing process instigated at the hospital. It is clear from Avril's memoirs that she found in dance a therapeutic art form; but it was one that she knowingly used, developed and created. Crucially, her dance was a process of deliberate intervention and control, rather than an aesthetically pleasing symptom of a psychological condition, which is often the impression conveyed by contemporary descriptions of her performance. This has already been suggested by the fact that she designed her own stage costumes carefully to achieve her artistic aim:

> The dance, for [Avril], had none of that carnal frenzy which gave La Goulue her lubricious fame. For her it was a language. Lautrec was delighted by the subtle figures she created, by the colour harmonies of her clothes [...] in which black, green, lilac, blue or orange were exquisitely juxtaposed. [49]

In spite of this, however, contemporary reports of Avril's performances recurrently utilise images that inherently affiliate her with motifs of femininity and madness, a tendency that can be seen in the Toulet quotation cited at the opening of this chapter with its focus on the rapid succession of unpredictable new rhythms that shaped Avril's dances. The symbolism of Toulet's description echoes one of Avril's popular nicknames, she was known as *La Mélinite,* the colloquial term for a type of explosive that was developed in the nineteenth century. These images both suggest that Avril's performance style was founded on a sense of the unexpected and on a

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[48]Cited in Bonduelle and Gelfand, p. 39.
[49]Henri Perruchot, *Toulouse-Lautrec* (London: Constable, 1994), p. 154.

disruption of conventional systems of movement and rhythm. The combination of this erratic style, her characteristic solipsism and the period of time that she spent at the *Salpetrière* – all areas that would automatically be linked with the extreme feminine side of contemporary dualities - that resulted in the connection between Jane Avril and madness in popular thought, suggested by her other enduring nickname, *Jane la Folle,* or Crazy Jane.

In contrast to *La Mélinite* and *L'Etrange*, Crazy Jane was a loaded cultural reference. Elaine Showalter has identified her as one of three central recurring images of female insanity in the history of art and literature. Crazy Jane emerged in the gothic literary tradition of the late eighteenth century. Generally she was depicted as a poor servant girl who went mad as a result of either being abandoned by her lover or left alone by his death. Her insanity was shaped by its docility and harmlessness, both to herself and to others. This is in direct contrast to the two other iconic images of female madness that Showalter offers, the suicidal Ophelia and the violent Lucia. This comparative passivity inherent in the Crazy Jane figure secured her enduring popularity, for as Showalter concludes:

> The appeal of Crazy Jane is not hard to fathom. What activities could pose less of a threat to domineering parents and false-hearted men? For Romantic writers, Crazy Jane was a touching image of feminine vulnerability and a flattering reminder of female dependence upon male affection. [50]

There are some evident links between the mythical female figure of Crazy Jane and Jane Avril's self-construction as a celebrity that suggest the origins of the nickname.

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[50]Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 13.

Firstly, Avril chose to adopt the anglicised version of her name, Jeanne, at the suggestion of a young English poet. This does seem to have been the result of fondness for him and for Britain, rather than the result of any natural sense of affiliation with the myth but it made the potential link more obvious. Perhaps more interestingly, there does also appear to be some echoes of the conventional representation of Crazy Jane in the publicity photograph referred to at the opening of this chapter. According to a contemporary description Crazy Jane, 'would dress her head with willow straw, and wild flowers, disposed in a fanciful style' and this promotional image of Avril contains elements of this natural, rustic conception of femininity. [51] There was, however, very little association between descriptions of Avril's dance and the image of Crazy Jane, a fact that highlights the way that *fin-de-siècle* gender ideology was disrupted when women moved, shifting from the passivity of the image to the activity of the performer. The Crazy Jane figure – and by extension the affiliation between women, madness and psychiatry – acted to reinforce ideas about women, irrationality and their fundamental dependence on men.

As the figures of Crazy Jane and the Hysteric suggest, any exploration of madness and femininity at the end of the nineteenth century takes place on difficult territory. In spite of this, however, a significant number of the issues that are raised by a consideration of *fin-de-siècle* femininity and insanity are similar to those that are evoked by the popular entertainment industry. The public face of the early study of psychology in the late nineteenth century focused almost entirely on women,

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[51]Sarah Wilkinson, cited in Showalter, p. 13.

specifically on the external symptoms of mental conditions that doctors believed were inscribed on the bodies of their female patients.

Jane Avril's awareness of the *Salpetrière* as a performance space on many levels and her understanding of its dynamics is important. She refused to adopt the opening to at least one layer of celebrity (in terms of hysteria) and this is crucial to her later development of her own performance style. The objectivity of her response to the fame of the hysterics she became close to also serves to distance her own performance from a subconscious expression of mental imbalance, moving it towards an innovative art form in its own right. This was a trend that was reflected throughout Avril's performance career and in the way that she utilised the spaces of mass culture and the other female performers who surrounded her within her negotiation of celebrity.

'The Cancan ignores, disdains and eliminates all that recalls rules, regulations and method'. [52]

During the interim between her time at the *Salpetrière* and her success as a popular performer, Avril served her apprenticeship in the mass culture industry by working as a cashier at the 1889 *exposition universelle* and performing as a bareback rider at *L'Hippodrome*, Paris's major circus venue. *L'Hippodrome* was owned and managed by Charles Zidler who, in partnership with Joseph Oller, opened the Moulin Rouge in October 1889 and offered Avril a regular contract to dance there. Avril accepted, although she refused a regular salary from Zidler, in order to maintain her artistic

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[52]From the memoirs of Marguerite Badel (the 1850s Cancan dancer Rigolboche), cited in David Price, *Cancan*

and creative independence. Instead she was paid seven francs for the evening if she joined in the quadrille, generally she danced alone but as we know from Arthur Symons's poetic account of, 'Olivier Metra's waltz of roses' in 'La Mélinite: Moulin Rouge', there were occasions when she performed alongside the other dancers. Throughout this period, and for the rest of her career, Avril also still danced for pleasure in the city's public dancing gardens, normally the *Bal Bullier*,on her time off.

The *Cancaneuse* is a cardinal figure in the development of representations and understandings of the late nineteenth-century female celebrity. In the 1880s and 1890s, the dance was the domain of the solo, female performer: as David Price has established a new generation of *Cancaneuses* emerged at the *fin de siècle*, a group of female performers who self-consciously framed themselves as celebrities. '[T]he new stars of the Cancan were professionals, who took great pride in their art. Their dancing was an unashamed demonstration of female sexuality'. [53] The Cancan's explicit dependence on the eroticised female body sites the *Cancaneuses* at the centre of an investigation of the popular stage performer and myths of femininity, the dance supplied the clearest and most publicized example of embodiment on the contemporary stage. The sexual, active body of the Cancan dancer was the antithesis of the organic movement encompassed in aesthetic conceptions of the *danseuse* and Avril's incorporation of elements of the dance and use of the dance-hall to experiment with her own style were key elements of her self-construction as a *fin-de-siècle* celebrity and accepted figure of the avant-garde.

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[53]David Price, *Cancan!* (London: Cygnus Arts, 1998), p. 21.

The *Moulin Rouge* figured as an important performance space for female dancers of the late nineteenth century and to comprehend its role in Avril's creative development it is necessary to reconstruct the environment that Paris's most renowned dance hall offered. Zidler and Oller were quintessential incarnations of the new social role of entrepreneur, part of the new generation of self-made men engendered by the technology and commodity culture of modernity. Both had extensive experience in the popular entertainment industry prior to their management of the *Moulin Rouge*: Zidler, as noted earlier, had opened the hugely successful circus *L'Hippodrome* and Joseph Oller was understood to be the father of French music hall, having created two of Paris's most successful music hall shows, '*Montagnes Russes*' and '*Les Fantasies Oller*'. The *Moulin Rouge* was the result of their mutual conviction that the Parisian public desired a new form of entertainment and that this could be discovered in the energetic dances characteristic of the city's working class dance halls. The new venue was established as a site for these new experiments with the desires of the mass audience.

Zidler and Oller carefully programmed the opening of the *Moulin Rouge* to coincide with the *exposition universelle* of 1889, a time when Paris was overrun with the mass audience of the exhibition. Their understanding of the arena of popular culture is further evinced by the decision to hand out many complimentary tickets for the venue's opening nights, based on their knowledge that, in the *fin-de-siècle* metropolis, crowds attracted crowds. Fostered by this mastery of the mechanisms of mass culture, the *Moulin Rouge* rapidly became the centre of Parisian nightlife; by

the 1890s the dance hall appears as frequently and as prominently on tourist maps of the city as either the *Louvre* or the Eiffel Tower.

The *fin-de-siècle* incarnation of the *Moulin Rouge* combined a cabaret theatre, a dance floor and large pleasure gardens that could hold up to six hundred people. Entertainment was offered in this outside environment, it had its own stage where acts were programmed in the evening and the gardens also housed an elephant sculpture, which acted as a private theatre. The pachyderm's belly contained a small stage that was reached by a spiral staircase located in one of the animal's legs, here, Zélaska, the *Moulin Rouge's* resident belly dancer gave nightly performances for a male-only audience, further emphasising the connection between the venue and the erotic. The interior décor of the dance hall was created around a Moorish theme, a decision that reflected the contemporary interest in the exoticism of other cultures in the same way as the belly dancer.

The design of the dance hall exhibited the contemporary fascination with display and ways of looking. The back wall of the venue was covered with a huge mirror that multiplied the ways of looking at the space through the reflections of colour, light and movement that Symons recreated in his poetic portrayal of Avril's performance. Furthermore, the highest gallery that ran around the dance floor was open to the public, offering the audience a greater variety of spectatorial positions and visual experiences. The artificially constructed, mass cultural environment of the *Moulin Rouge* reflects the aims and the themes of contemporary popular culture and

highlights the fact that, at the *fin de siècle* the hall was in no way focused wholly around the Cancan. As a representation of the arena of mass culture it offered a relatively democratic space for both performance and spectatorship, as figure twelve, a contemporary photograph of the venue illustrates.

Figure twelve: The exterior of the *Moulin Rouge*

The *Moulin Rouge*'s programme may not have consisted solely of the Cancan, but the venue's renowned dance style was integral to the development of the female celebrity. In addition to this its direct influence on Jane Avril renders it central to an understanding of her performance and makes it important to trace the roots of the style. The Hollywood cinema of the mid-twentieth century has cemented a false image of nineteenth-century French Cancan in the Western consciousness; the celluloid vision of the perfectly choreographed movement of a chorus line of identically dressed girls that formed the imagistic motif of popular films such as

Paris Cancan is a wholly inaccurate reconstruction of the performances of the *fin-de-siècle* dance halls. The development of Cancan into a chorus line performance during the twentieth century and the salaciousness with which Cancan has been imbued has been intensified by the marketing of present day Montmartre as Paris's erotic centre.

The myths that surround the nineteenth-century entertainment industry and Cancan are central to an understanding of both contemporary and retrospective representations of the *Cancaneuse.* The dance's inherent association with sexuality has formed a key symbol in the representations of late nineteenth-century Parisian mass culture as chaotic spaces that were affiliated with the feminine. The social disapproval that was provoked by the Cancan peaked at the *fin de siècle,* revealing the entwined relationship between specific historic gender constructs and the popular stage. The Cancan's celebration of female physicality and sexuality demolished contemporary ideals of femininity, most clearly through the ways in which the movement of the dance transgressed the gendered active/passive binary of the late nineteenth century. The denunciation of the Cancan offers an interesting insight into the coexistent anxieties that surrounded activity, female corporeality and the developing modern category of the female celebrity during the 1890s.

The Cancan was not a product of the late nineteenth century; it had evolved gradually over the previous two centuries. The origins of the frenetic version of the Cancan that became popular in the *fin-de-siècle* dance halls have been located in

eighteenth-century working-class dances, while other theories suggest that these can be traced back to provincial fertility rituals from the Middle Ages. [54] By the middle of the nineteenth century the Cancan had developed into a mainly improvised dance with openings for solo performances for each dancer, and the female performers – the *Cancaneuses* – had become Parisian celebrities. From this point, until the end of the century, Cancan was to remain the domain of the solo female performer and the history of the Cancan offers access to a diverse group of individual, strong female performers within *fin-de-siècle* popular culture.

The roots of the inherent association between the Cancan and the female performer are located in the period of the Second Empire, an era renowned for its relaxed moral atmosphere and its emphasis on superficial beauty and pleasure. These relatively liberal social conditions naturally fostered the Cancan as an entertainment form and its popularity increased significantly during the period. An entry for Cancan – in its earlier form as *quanquan* - in an 1814 dictionary makes no reference to the dance, defining the term as the creation of a lot of noise or a scene. [55] By 1863, eleven years into the Second Empire, the spelling Cancan is included in the dictionary and the description includes a direct reference to an 'improper style of dance' and focuses on the excessive level of movement that the form involved, particularly the high kicks. [56] It was during the period that the Cancan was established as Parisian entertainment, fostered by a relatively relaxed moral environment and the technologies of the new mass culture industry. The Second

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[54]Price, p. 7.
[55]*Dictionnaire de l'Académie Francaise* (Paris: Bossange et Masson, 1814) 5th Edition, p. 452.
[56]'sorte de danse inconvenante des bals publics avec des sauts exagérés et des gestes impudents, moquers et de mauvais ton', *Dictionnaire de la Langue Francaise* (Paris: Libraire Hachette, 1863), p. 532.

Empire also witnessed many of the city's famous courtesans' recognition of the efficiency of the dance as a means of attracting new clients. The poster of Liane de Pougy included in chapter three illustrates this well-advertised connection between the world of popular entertainment and sex as a commodity.

The presence of the courtesans as performers in the dance halls of the 1860s and 1870s cemented the link between the Cancan, mass culture and prostitution. It also suggests that concerns surrounding the unregulated sexuality of the *Cancaneuse* were partially grounded in social reality. This connection between Cancan and prostitution is an image that has endured - aided perhaps again by modern visions of the Montmartre dance halls as areas of easily available sex – but it is important to recognise that the implicit association between the dancer and the 'fallen woman' did not appear concomitantly with the growing popularity of Cancan. Subjected to a similar set of discourses to those that had framed the actress as a morally disputable figure, the nineteenth-century ballerina was located in a questionable social position. The romantic ballet may have been the stronghold of the middle-class, but even a passing glance at Degas's paintings of dancers in rehearsal at the *Opéra* reveals an artistic interpretation of its link with prostitution through the presence of older, middle-class gentlemen who watch the female dancers from the wings. These encounters were staged events where the gentleman could decide upon the woman that he favoured, under the eyes of the dancers' chaperone. Under these circumstances the dancers' chaperone often acted as nothing more than a thinly disguised *madame.* In spite of the idealised image that is evoked by the ballet dancer

today, in the late nineteenth-century popular imagination the immediate link between the dancer and the prostitute was firmly established well before the rise of the *Cancaneuse.*

There is one striking difference between the presence of prostitution at the ballet and at the dance-halls, however, the Cancan was characterised by its admission and celebration of female sexuality, both by women who performed the dance and by the men and women who went to the dance halls where it was performed. The question of prostitution and the extent to which the performer's body was a commodity, on and offstage, does problematise an investigation of Cancan dancers as performers: it would be naïve to suggest that the *Cancaneuses* of *fin-de-siècle* Paris were all self-conscious performers who danced solely for creative expression and liberation, for it is clear that many were primarily prostitutes who danced to supplement their income and – quite literally – to advertise themselves to future clients. This element of Cancan was reflected in the transition of the understanding of the popular stage in Paris, as Lucinda Jarrett states in a history of erotic dance, '[w]hat was new to Paris was the elevation of the prostitute to the status of performance artist and the brothel to the status of the theatre'. [57] Within this problematic image of the dance hall as a thinly veiled brothel, however, are contained the histories of women, such as Jane Avril, who were primarily autonomous performers.

Zidler quickly recognised Avril's unique talent and, keen to retain his main star, he allowed the dancer a level of artistic freedom that was denied to the other

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[57]Lucinda Jarrett, *Stripping in Time: A History of Erotic Dancing* (London: San Francisco: Pandora, 1997), p. 38.

cancaneuses. Avril was not obliged to participate in the *quadrille,* instead she danced alone to slow waltz tunes. Zidler also allowed Avril liberties with her costume. Instead of the white underwear that the other dancers were obliged to wear she could choose any combination of colours for her performances. Avril optimised this freedom, experimenting with contrasting shades and with layered costumes that revealed spectrums of colour as she moved to create new levels of expression. José Shercliff, Avril's biographer, describes: 'Her first gown was scarlet and underneath it tiers of skirts shaded down the whole gamut of reds to the palest shell pink. Another was cherry-coloured silk, the petticoats fading through tones of heliotrope and lavender. Under a flame-coloured gown that made her hair look almost platinum blonde, she wore tulip green, ice-blue under cyclamen, primrose under green.' [58] This innovative use of colour on the stage of a mainstream dance hall was a key element in the respect that she earned from avant-garde figures. It also isolated Avril from the link between prostitute and dance-hall performer, the self-conscious use of costume in her dance made it clear that this was performance. A comparison between Avril and one of the city's most famous *cancaneuses*, La Goulue, reveals how Avril appropriated the dance rather than conforming to the contemporary ideas that surrounded it.

La Goulue has been immortalised as the central female figure in Toulouse-Lautrec's first and most famous poster, 'La Goulue: Au Moulin Rouge'. Descriptions of her performance correspond with the conventional definition of the Cancan dancer as overtly sexualised and her image and dancing defines the diverse ways in which the

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[58]Shercliff, p. 100.

performance space of mass culture and the new sphere of the female celebrity could be used by late nineteenth-century women. La Goulue was the stage name of Louise Weber (1866-1929). The literal translation of her name is 'The Glutton', and there are two versions of how she arrived at this nickname. The first is that she would always clear all the glasses left on tables in the local bars and dance halls. The second, that as the teenage mistress of a young aristocrat - Goulu-Chilapine - she was known as the 'femme de Goulu', which was shortened to La Goulue. What is significant is that the stage name that Weber adopted made no reference to either her appearance or her performance style. This was unusual for the time, when performers tended to be named after their physical attributes, exemplified by 'Nini la belle en cuisse' (Nini of the Beautiful Thighs), or 'Grille d'Egout', a less complimentary reference to the drainage grill like appearance of the teeth of one of La Goulue's contemporaries. The fact that La Goulue's stage name did not reflect her appearance indicates that she was not perceived as a beautiful or hugely talented celebrity. Rather, responses to her suggest that she was seen as something of a curiosity and many that audience members went to see her perform out of intrigue. As Lucinda Jarrett explains in her study of female erotic dance: '[e]ven at the height of her fame she remained an eccentric curiosity, more of a circus freak than star celebrity'. [59]

As a young woman, La Goulue worked at her mother's laundry and developed the habit of borrowing items of glamorous underwear and wearing them to perform as an amateur at the city's public dance halls and gardens. Weber quickly developed a

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[59]Jarrett, p. 47.

reputation for her dance and moved from amateur to professional performer within the space of a couple of years. The exact location of her debut is unknown, but her mother's laundry was close to the *Moulin de la Galette*, a small dancing gardens located on the hillside of the *Butte de Montmartre*. Georges Montorgueil noted that the *Moulin de la Galette* was one of the oldest dance halls in the city that was a popular subject for writers, poets and artists. [60] Repeated references to La Goulue in contemporary accounts of the *Moulin de la Galette*, makes it seem likely that it was one of the first places where she danced as a paid, professional performer.

La Goulue's performance style provoked strong divisions in her audiences, but, in spite of contemporary disagreements, it is clear that her performance did attract interest, whereas dancers whose work was considered to be pure crudity were simply dismissed. This was the case with the *Moulin Rouge* dancer, La Môme Fromage, who was La Goulue's lover for a while in the 1890s, who was condemned by a contemporary observer as, 'nothing but an ignoble, ugly woman'. [61] Lucinda Jarrett reaches the conclusion that, 'La Goulue's craft was as difficult to define as the dancer. It fell between the art of performance and obscenity, between beauty and ugliness, exciting passion and crude vulgarity.' [62] The notion that nineteenth-century erotic performance existed at some point in between a set of clearly opposed binaries is significant. Especially when one considers that this location was in a state of flux that depended upon the social and historical conditions of the time. The unstable nature of the ideas surrounding femininity, eroticism and performance that

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[60]Georges Montorgueil, *Paris Dansant,* (Paris: Libraire L. Conquet, 1897), p. 145.
[61]Cited in Price, p. 54.
[62]Jarrett, p.49.

shaped the dance of Louise Weber are made clear in a contemporary account:

> From the start, her cheeks grow ripe like peaches, her wild hair flies about like gossamer fibres. No method, nor order, but a sure sense of rhythm and an undeniable openness and gaiety. She lifts her arms, careless of the strap taking the place of the sleeve; her legs bend, sway about, hitting the air and threatening hats. [...] La Goulue is an enchantress. [63]

The inherent conflict contained in the language and imagery of this portrayal of La Goulue reveals the tensions inherent in *fin de siècle* classifications of women. The influence of contemporary gender myths is evinced in the description of La Goulue's eroticised performance style as a form of 'enchantment'. A connection that draws on the associations perceived between femininity and exoticism and directly reflects the combined threat and appeal of the dangerous sexuality contained within the *femme fatale.* The integration of the metaphorical set of ideas surrounding transgressive femininity into writings on popular culture demonstrates how ingrained the link between women and spirituality was by the *fin de siècle.* The extreme corporeality and energy of La Goulue's dance is the antithesis of contemporary images of ethereal femininity, yet her affiliation with the *femme fatale* in this contemporary account still associates her with the element of the spiritual. The dualistic interpretation of femininity during the period offered no option for dealing with embodiment.

La Goulue was renowned for her exhibitionism and her pride in her body, both in her onstage and offstage performance, as a contemporary account recorded:

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[63]Eugène Rodrigues, cited in Price, p. 46.

> She was a provocative exhibitionist, who enjoyed flashing
> herself at the audience, and allowing her audience to guess
> at all they could not see amid the jumble of her underwear.
> As she lifted up her leg she revealed a large area of naked
> flesh between the garter and the first layer of underwear.
> The transparent material scarcely veiled the rest of her body [...] [64]

Numerous erotic images of La Goulue are still in existence, of which figure thirteen is a characteristic example. She was the first Parisian cover girl to be photographed in the nude and when the Moulin Rouge introduced street balls and the *tableaux vivants* into their entertainment programme happily performed topless. Weber's attitude towards the sexuality of her performance and the erotic images that she posed for was well-publicised and provides an interesting angle on the relationship between performance and femininity in the late nineteenth century. In spite of the transgression of ideas of femininity that characterised representations of Weber, she defiantly rejected any comparison of her actions with prostitution in a manner that suggests that she considered her status as a performer, the result of her self-construction as a celebrity, to locate her in a separate space to the fallen women of the city: an environment that was governed by a different set of moral and visual codes. Weber's construction of the popular stage revolved around its role as a liberating environment that protected her from the moral accusations and judgements of contemporary society.

These photographs only offer one element of her La Goulue's persona and performance, however, as it was not possible to photograph her dancing, due to the length of exposure time the early cameras required. This re-emphasises the

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[64]Gil Blas, cited in Jarrett, p. 35.

importance of Lautrec's images of female performers, the result of his interest in recreating the visual effects of their dance; Lautrec's posters reflect more than the eroticism of the celebrities, rather they convey a sense of movement and creative agency.

Figure thirteen: Photograph of Louise Weber (La Goulue) (undated)

Louise Weber acts as an important transitional figure in the history of the *Cancaneuse,* she was not a courtesan like the earlier dancers who would perform infrequently to attract new clientele (such performers included Caroline Otéro, Liane de Pougy, Emilienne d'Alençon, discussed in the previous chapter) and she refused the link between performer and prostitute. In fact Weber would not have been accepted as a courtesan as she refused the 'social graces' to take on board the manners and pretence that such a role involved. Being a courtesan involved adopting society's current ideas about ideal femininity - one of the main concern's involving prostitution was the difficulty in differentiating between the 'respectable'

and 'fallen' woman. Although it may seem that Weber's objectification on stage cannot be defended from a feminist perspective this starts to question the nature of the way that we judge / categorise women within a specific historical context. That Jane Avril appropriated certain elements of the *cancaneuses* of the Moulin Rouge, whilst remaining distanced from them, is revealed in another publicity photograph from the period that portrays her performing the 'grand écarts', a representational pose of the *cancaneuses* of *fin-de-siècle* Paris.

Figure fourteen: Publicity photograph of Jane Avril (undated)

As an alternative to the a-historical accusations of essentialism that fail to take into account the options and spheres that were open to women at a specific time and explored here through the motif of the circle and the frequent exclusion of the eroticised body of the *Cancaneuse* (including Louise Weber) from feminist explorations of the period, Susan Manning has constructed a theory of modern dance that revolves around the concept of kinaesthetic power. Manning argues that the

movement of the female body on the stage dismantled the male gaze and addressed itself to the female spectator, as a 'kinaesthetic power [that] challenged male viewers to see the female dancer as an expressive subject rather than as an erotic object'. [65] A theoretical method that is based upon the subversive potential of the female body in motion fits well with an investigation of the period of modernity, with its preoccupation with technology and speed. Manning's work also engages with modern dance within its specific historic context. The notion of kinaesthetic power relocates the female performer, from the passive vulnerability of stillness and objectification and into the active world of urban discourses represented by the consumer-driven spectacle of the *fin-de-siècle* metropolitan mass culture. It thus fits in with the idea of an active / passive binary as a shaping force on representations and understandings of femininity on the popular stage. Manning's ideas also transfer well into the sphere of performance theory and analysis of the meaning and interpretation of the female embodiment on the popular stage.

Theoretical approaches to early modern dance can be helpful if applied alongside a contextual reading of the *fin-de-siècle* female performer as a historically specific figure. This evades the impediment of an a-historical discussion of conceptual forces, such as essentialism, which results in unrealistic judgments of what women were achieving in the creative arenas that were open to them at a specific moment. The use of other approaches in combination with dance theory highlights elements such as the female spectator, whose presence changes the accepted dynamics of the

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[65]Susan Manning, 'The Female Dancer and the Male Gaze: Feminist Critiques of Early Modern Dance', in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* (Durham; London: Duke University), 153-66 (p. 163).

form.

The urban spaces and metaphors that Avril employed to frame herself as an expressive performer and a celebrity locate her at the centre of the concepts involved in the *fin-de-siècle* discursive construction of femininity. The origins of Avril's performance and self-construction as a celebrity in an institutional space saturated with myths of insanity and femininity and their development in the transgressive space of the dance hall reveal how the popular stage offered a creative and liberating environment. Within the arena of mass culture social constructions of gender - the system of binaries that shaped contemporary ideology - could be disrupted. Avril's destabilisation of the boundaries between 'High' and 'Low' culture and the rational and the irrational isolated her from the other dancers of the *Moulin Rouge* and transformed the popular stage into a site of theatrical innovation.

In contrast to Jane Avril, whose links with and influence on the experimental artistic communities of late nineteenth-century Paris have gone largely unnoted, the work of Loïe Fuller (1862-1928) has attracted the interest of scholars of the *fin-de-siècle* across the disciplines, including performance, culture, art history and gender. It is tempting initially to assume that this difference in the attention given to the two celebrities has simply been the result of a critical discomfort with engaging with the ephemeral, and often overtly sexual, work of the late nineteenth-century popular stage. This has been a particular issue for feminist scholars, eased by the fact that, in spite of the fact that Fuller performed at Paris's venues of mass culture, she has

always been affiliated with the *avant-garde*. However, as chapter two has revealed, the work of scholars such as Peter Bailey and Vanessa Schwartz, has begun the process of reconfiguring our understandings of popular culture and establishing it as a genre of performance that contains the roots of both the experimental and the resistive. Rather it appears that the roots of our contemporary understandings of these two performers are partially located in their own negotiations of the nineteenth-century mechanics of celebrity. This chapter opened with the idea that Jane Avril was able to constantly reinvent herself through her performance, 'she seems never tired, always re-inventing herself'. [66] Loïe Fuller shaped and promoted herself as an aesthetic authority whose art lent itself to the space, size and technological advances that were offered by the *fin-de-siècle* popular stage.

> Instead of the traditional dancer in tights and muslin skirt, instead of the familiar but ever-entertaining acrobatics [...] there appeared one evening at the back of the darkened stage the indistinct form of a woman clothed in a mass of drapery. Suddenly a stream of light issued apparently from the woman herself, while around her folds of gauze rose and fell in phosphorescent waves. [67]

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[66]Cited in Shercliff, p. 87.
[67]Nigel Gosling, *Paris 1900-1914: The Miraculous Years* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), p. 20.

Chapter Five: 'The human body is ready to express, and it would express if it were at liberty to do so': Loïe Fuller and Popular Performance [1]

The American dancer, Loïe Fuller's (1868–1926), aesthetic ideals were founded on her understanding of the power of corporeality and movement, an approach that centralised the active, female body on the stage. Fuller self-consciously used her body in performance as a carefully constructed signifier that allowed her to deconstruct the duality of body/mind shaped by nineteenth-century formulations of sexuality and gender. The definition of dance that Fuller included in her autobiography, *Fifteen Years of a Dancer's Life, With Some Account of her Distinguished Friends* (1913), reflects the expressive role occupied by the body in her performance theory:

> What is the dance? It is motion.
> What is motion? The expression of a sensation.
> What is a sensation? The reaction in the human body produced by an impression or an idea perceived by the mind.
> A sensation is the reverberation that the body receives when an impression strikes the mind. [2]

The immediate notion that this statement suggests is that Fuller subscribed to the instinctive nature of dance proposed by the symbolists; the idea that the body reverberates in response to a mental impression appears to imply that the movement is an automatic response. This, however, provides a clear example of Fuller's complicated relationship with gender, ideology and aesthetics. Every element of Fuller's dances was meticulously rehearsed, a process necessitated through her incorporation of complex technological effects. Fuller demanded complete control of her performance space and the manner in which she was represented, both on stage and in the modern marketing industry.

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[1]Loïe Fuller, *Fifteen Years of a Dancer's Life, with Some Account of her Distinguished Friends* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1913), p. 70.
[2]Fuller, p. 70.

The production of 'visual metaphor' that Mark Franko has located as central to Fuller's performance was thus entirely based upon this combination of her aesthetic agenda and extended rehearsal process. [3] In Fuller's understanding of performance the body became the site of the expression and the interpretation of psychological processes, realised through the technologies of modernity. Her dance demanded that the female body acted as an expressive vehicle that was worthy of artistic attention and interpretation in its own right, raising the cultural status of the body from the realm of the primal to a role as an aesthetic entity.

Loïe Fuller's Mirror Dance (figure fifteen) displays the creation of a kaleidoscopic illusion of numerous figures dancing: a myriad of dancers, who, it appeared, looked only at themselves. 'The Mirror Dance' was included in Fuller's programme during the 1890s, the early Parisian period of her career, and it echoes the solipsistic tendencies that characterised Jane Avril's dancing style. Fuller's onstage presence(s) in 'The Mirror Dance' refuted the autoeroticism that was read in Avril's performance, however, through the development and complication of the role of the performer's body as a signifier. The female form is multiplied in Fuller's dance, yet there remains only one actual corporeal body on the stage, surrounded by its insubstantial reflections. The performance queried which of these dancing figures the audience member (whether male or female) should focus on by questioning which visual image of femininity was the real body of the dancer: Fuller disrupted the spectators' gaze(s) and displaced the body of the dancer as a spectacular onstage object. This chapter explores Loïe Fuller's use of the active, performing female body as a site where contemporary

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[3]Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism / Performing Politics* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1995), p. 14.

constructions of gender, mass culture and the avant-garde coalesced and were challenged.

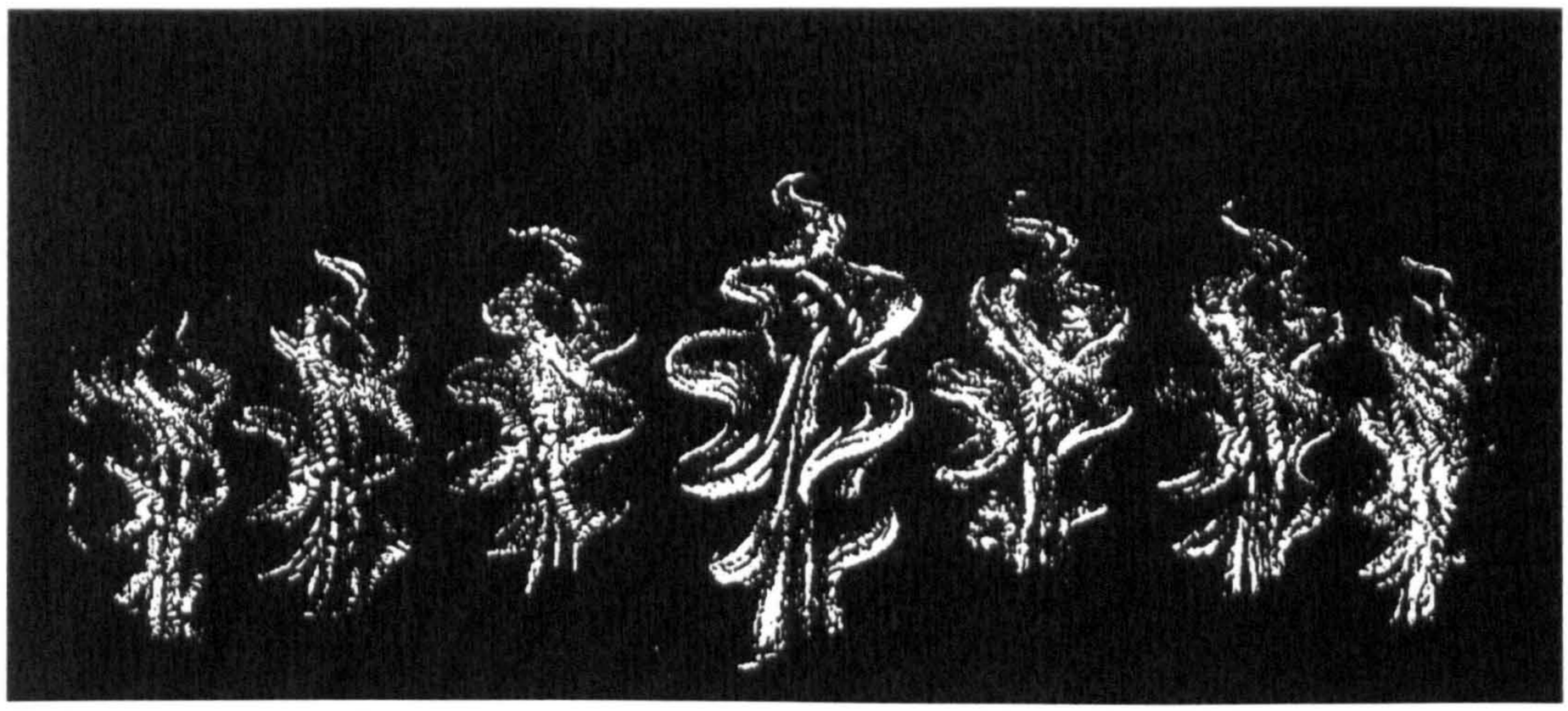

Figure fifteen: 'The Mirror Dance'.

In 'The Mirror Dance' Fuller destabilised, and thus symbolically rejected, the complex set of metropolitan gaze(s) that constituted her audience through the removal of the assurance that the 'body' that they were looking at was the corporeal presence of the dancer. Her strategy centred around the negation of the audience's status as a solely voyeuristic presence; instead her performance eliminated any passive mode of spectatorship, forcing her viewers' gaze(s) to work, move and to question the on stage spectacle. Fuller achieved this entirely through the careful construction of her performance space: both in real terms, the way that she controlled the physical stage and auditorium and in the illusory creation of other spaces through the use of light and the reflections produced by the semi-circle of mirrors that surrounded her. The result of this disempowerment of contemporary ways of looking was the complication of the contemporary discursive network that surrounded gender and identity.

Fuller's interest in the themes of insubstantiality and reflection continued throughout her performance career and she introduced a new exploration of them in her 1899 season at the *Folies-Bergère.* This version retained the semi-circle of mirrors located behind her but added a large sheet of plate glass across the front of the stage: this allowed the audience to see the dancer, but also reflected her image, both to herself and in the other mirrors that encircled her. The critic, Jean Lorrain, was unimpressed by the visual effect this produced: '[t]he glass cage struck him as an aquarium, inside of which Loïe was cut up and her fragments parcelled out'. [4] The notion that the mirrored space conveyed the impression of a cage is inherently connected with Fuller's interest in *fin-de-siècle* constructions of femininity and the image, and Lorrain's aesthetic objection to the dance in this context is revealing. Lorrain's primary problem with the piece appears to have been the manner in which Fuller had broken down the female body through the dance, producing images of fragmentation that conflicted with the contemporary metaphorical link between women and organicism raised earlier and of particular relevance to the work of the Art Nouveau artists discussed later in this chapter.

The two models of 'The Mirror Dance' illustrate the inseparable combination of physical performance and theatrical space that Fuller developed to question and undermine contemporary attempts to establish secure definitions of the relationship between sexuality and corporeality. In spite of the themes of fragmentation and multiplication that were present in Fuller's performance, however, the problematic question of essentialism in modern dance that was raised in relation to Jane Avril has still influenced responses to her work. It is

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[4]Richard Nelson Current and Marcia Ewing Current, *Loïe Fuller: Goddess of Light* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1997), p.114.

clearly present in contemporary reviews of Fuller's dance and it is important to acknowledge the level of assumption about the expression of femininity through her work that is evinced in these writings. Mrs M. Griffiths interviewed Fuller for *The Strand Magazine* in 1894 and described the 'The Mirror Dance' in the following terms:

> [...] by some mysterious arrangement, eight Loïe Fullers appear to be dancing at the same time, and the whole stage is bathed in a flood of glorious tints, in which may be seen aerial forms, in cloudlike vestures, whirling and dancing as if they were the fabled victims of the Tarantula [...] [5]

This short extract reveals the characteristically reductive *fin-de-siècle* approach to the popular female performer: the active dancing body has been written off of the stage in this recreation of the dance and replaced with a stage picture that is conveyed as a Turner-esque vision of colours and insubstantial shapes. The weightless 'aerial forms' echo the ethereal ideal of passive femininity that recurred as an image of contemporary visual art; through their lack of physicality the dancer is de-eroticised whilst simultaneously imbued with an unclassifiable, non-corporeal sexual presence and power.

Griffiths's choice of mythical reference is also significant. The Tarantula (also known as the Tarantati and, by the nineteenth century, the Tarantella) was a dance form rooted in ideas encompassing femininity, sickness, madness and sexuality. The form's origins are rooted in Southern Italian folklore; the dance was a supposed cure for Tarantism (the effects of the fatal bite of the tarantula spider). The symptoms of Tarantism were those of nervous sickness, characterised by fits of melancholy and stupor and an uncontrollable desire to dance. This protracted dancing was understood to be the only antidote to the

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[5]Mrs M. Griffiths, 'Loïe Fuller – The Inventor of the Serpentine Dance', *The Strand Magazine*, May 1894, p. 545.

poison (the rational explanation for this being that the sweat that was built up by the frenzied movement allowed the body to excrete the venom through the pores). The tarantula, however, was also performed by Italian women as a traditional part of carnivalesque, orgiastic rites in small villages and it continued to exist when medical cures for the arachnid's poison had been discovered. The dance signifies residual pagan ideas and a level of resistance to the socio-sexual repression that shaped nineteenth-century European ideas.

Although it is important to acknowledge that an interest in the origins of dance, in particular its folkloric traditions, shaped contemporary approaches to the form and that references to dancing in antiquity and myth were commonplace, the choice of the image of the tarantula also acts as an important commentary on understandings of femininity. Descriptions of the dance are framed in a similar set of iconography and language to the recorded movement of the hysteric and the other dancing manias of interest to the late nineteenth-century psychiatric community. The affiliation between Jane Avril, Loïe Fuller and the discursive network of insanity that shaped responses to dance is clear here. That Fuller's dance was not immune from these ideas, although she had no personal link with psychological illness reveals and emphasises the pervasiveness of the connection.

Combined, 'The Mirror Dance' and Griffiths's contemporary response encapsulate Fuller's appropriation and absorption of nineteenth-century attempts to control and define femininity. Crucially they question whether verbal and visual images of her performance that connect it with dominant ideas surrounding femininity, such as the review cited above, were the result of the

spectator's presumptions about women, or whether Fuller's endeavour to transform the nature of the female performer and to adopt the spaces of mass culture as an arena for experimental performance failed. In 'The Mirror Dance' Fuller presented onstage illusions of femininity that could clearly be interpreted as complying with contemporary gender ideals, yet these reflections were the projection and the creation of her corporeal and active physical presence, made possible by her mastery of the masculinised culture of technological modernity. As the effects of 'The Mirror Dance' suggest, questions surrounding corporeality and the gaze lie at the core of any attempt to recreate and to interpret Fuller's *fin-de-siècle* performance style.

The complexity of the ideas that are encompassed by Fuller's performance and fame is increased when they are considered in their specific historic context, in direct relation to the emergence of the female celebrity as a new cultural figure. In spite of the fact that Fuller's onstage presence could be interpreted as fulfilling many of the contemporary ideals of sexuality, eroticism and femininity (albeit in order to subvert them), she entirely rejected the prerequisites for femininity off stage: her transformation during performance was absolute. Consequently, her challenge to ideas of gender was not only restricted to the sphere of performance, it also extended to her off stage persona; she utilised the binaries of *the fin-de-siècle* to deconstruct them.

The disappointment that many admirers experienced when they met Fuller

offstage, independent of the lighting and the costume that created her dance, reveals her refusal to conform to the image of the celebrity. Fuller recounts an occasion of this in her autobiography, when she offered a post-show backstage visit to the daughter of a famous Parisian architect and states that the excitement of the child at this prospect was provoked, 'not at the idea of seeing me, but of being in the presence of an extraordinary creature, a kind of fairy'. [6] After the performance, the child was taken to wait in a dressing room and, when Fuller appeared, the young girl shrank away and exclaimed, 'No, no. That isn't her. I don't want to see her. This one here is a fat lady, and it was a fairy I saw dancing'. [7] In addition to the tone of amusement, Fuller narrates the whole event in the third person, a distancing effect that imbues the passage with a self-conscious sense of irony and gives the impression that the Loïe narrating is yet another version of herself.

It is clear that Fuller's approach to the question of celebrity was inherently dualistic for, although she appears to have had no desire to present herself as a conventional 'star' of the 1890s, the pictures that accompany an interview in *The Sketch* in 1893 are typical portrait photographs that connect her with other female celebrities of the period. The first page of the article is devoted to a full-page shot of the dancer in a conventional pose and wearing a costume covered in roses (figure sixteen). There are striking similarities between this image of Fuller and the publicity photograph of Jane Avril included in the previous chapter. Both experimental performers adopted characteristic late nineteenth-century ideas surrounding femininity in their marketing material, revealing that the limited

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[6]Fuller, pp. 140-1.
[7]Fuller, pp 141-2.

appropriation of contemporary constructions of the female celebrity offered Avril and Fuller the opportunity to mythologise themselves as 'stars' through their performances, whilst evading the majority of the ideas of femininity that dominated contemporary society.

Figure sixteen: 'The Flower Dance'

The critic, Arsène Alexandre, said of Loïe Fuller that, '[i]t is true that one rarely sees an individual as perfectly double as Miss Loïe'. [8] The awed nature of Alexandre's response to an encounter with the dancer in 1900 provides a direct contrast to the anecdotal narratives that lament the unprepossessing, offstage Fuller. The relative ease with which Loïe Fuller managed to distinguish and

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[8]Arsène Alexandre, 'Le Théâtre de la Loïe Fuller', *Le Théâtre*, no date, 23.

maintain her on and off stage personas was partially owed to the diverse roles that she occupied in relation to her celebrity: unlike many contemporary dancers, she both created and realised her artistic vision. In addition to her onstage role, Fuller was a competent technician and inventor who both designed and patented the majority of her many stage sets, lighting effects and costumes. Her experimental work with electricity, chemical dyes and new fabrics provides a clear example of the manner in which her performance negotiated and intertwined similar discursive fields to Avril: where Avril's dance supplied a convergence of 'masculinity' (science and rationality) and femininity (spectacle and insanity), Fuller's active intervention in the scientific world forced the ideologically gendered constructs of science and spectacle to collide.

In the context of the sexual politics of the *fin de siècle*, the most notable role that Fuller fulfilled was of her own manager and creative director. Following a disastrous experience in her early twenties, when she married her first financial supporter, Colonel B. Hayes, to later discover that he was both a bigamist and implicated in the suspicious death of her father, there is – perhaps unsurprisingly - no mention of any patriarchal managerial figure in Fuller's career. In spite of the increasing numbers of female theatre managers during the period, the absence of either a paternalistic or a Svengali-esque figure from the career of a popular performer is unusual. Furthermore, at the end of the century she also adopted the traditionally male role of patron, with her financial and artistic support of both Isadora Duncan and the Japanese dancer Sado Yacco, whose work she staged in her theatre at the 1900 exhibition.

The significance of Fuller's unmitigated control over every element of her

performance was identified by the symbolist leader Stéphane Mallarmé, who found Fuller's work inspirational, and used her as the central figure of his writing on dance in *Crayonné au Théâtre.* Mallarmé sensed in Fuller's performance style something that he believed to be closely aligned with his own developing ideas surrounding the symbolist aesthetic, outlined in the previous chapter. Yet, even with this pervasive interest in the spiritual elements of her performance, Mallarmé recognised the reality of Fuller's skills to be as much technical as performative. He famously labelled her dancing as an, 'industrial achievement', making it clear that the two elements were not mutually exclusive. [9]

The creative validation that Loïe Fuller received from Paris's artistic communities has located her as a significant figure within the *fin-de-siècle* avant-garde, an understanding of her work that has been fostered particularly by her influential role in the aesthetics of symbolism and Art Nouveau. Innes's conception of the avant-garde as a network of cross-fertilising innovations locates Fuller as a key figure in contemporary aesthetic development and experimentation: she was a close acquaintance of (among others), Paul Verlaine, Auguste Rodin, Stéphane Mallarmé, Alexandre Dumas, Marie Curie, Sarah Bernhardt and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. The disparate natures, interests and artistic agendas of this collection of individuals suggests the diversity of sources that Fuller drew upon for her performance and the breadth of influence that her dance had on Paris's experimental communities. Fuller's social circle also indicates the unusual aesthetic location she occupied, in the combination of her role as a mass cultural celebrity and her acceptance into the city's avant-garde

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[9]Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Crayonné au Théâtre', in *Oeuvres Complète*, ed. by Bertrand Marchal (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), p. 307.

and intellectual scene, a position that she shared with Jane Avril. As the editor of *The Poster* commented in 1899, '[i]t is not given to the *ordinary dancing girl* to attract and retain the interest of writers such as Dumas fils, men of science such as Camille Flammarion, and artists such as Rodin' (my emphasis). [10]

In spite of this aesthetic recognition, however, at the height of her career Loïe Fuller was fundamentally a popular stage performer, who had worked as an actress and a singer in the mainstream theatres of New York and London prior to her discovery of the serpentine dance. Fuller did not begin performing in Paris until she was twenty-nine, remarkably old for a dancer in the late nineteenth century, when the conventional requirements for a performer were physical, a youthful figure and beauty. In general, this inherent connection between Fuller's performance career and mass culture has been neglected. One reason for this is the result of the theorisation and the adulation of her work by the early modernist experimental movements and later figures, such as Mallarmé and Yeats, which transformed Fuller into an aesthetic ideal that appears to be incompatible with the arena of the popular stage. As noted earlier in this thesis, however, the *fin-de-siecle* differentiation between mass culture and the avant-garde was not as straightforward as retrospective accounts have tended to suggest. Fuller incorporated this conceptual instability into her dance and combined the two performance environments effortlessly, identifying her work as avant-garde and experimental whilst simultaneously remaining acutely aware of the necessity of her continuing status as a popular performer. She employed and manipulated the new social role of the celebrity offered by modernity to ensure access to a

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[10]'La Loïe Fuller and her Artistic Advertisements', *The Poster*, February 1899, p. 69.

performance space and funding for her progressively more complex technological experimentation.

That Fuller actively managed every element of her celebrity, on and off stage, is revealed through her management of the stage space and her rejection of the celebrity lifestyle that had been born as a result of the *fin-de-siècle* blurring of the definitive boundaries between fantasy and reality and can be developed through an investigation of her control over her image. Fuller's awareness of the social mechanisms that constituted the late nineteenth-century female mass cultural celebrity enabled her to use the cultural role to her advantage. Diverse representations of the dancer appear across the artistic disciplines, including visual works by Jules Chéret, Toulouse-Lautrec and Rodin and poetic and prosaic pieces by Jean Lorrain and George Rodenbach. In addition to this, interpretations of Fuller's dance as representative of an ideal synthetic image of femininity located her as a key influence of the symbolists and the quintessential contemporary icon of the Art Nouveau movement. The saturation of the cultural environment with images of Fuller is the result of the complex combination of her performance and her realistic understanding of the workings of celebrity in the late nineteenth century.

'Loïe Fuller was the creation of her own imagination and the fantasies of *fin-de-siècle* Paris.' [11]

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[11]Margaret Haile Harris, *Loie Fuller: Magician of Light* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1979), p. 13.

Fuller is renowned for her fictional reworkings of her life story; she consistently invented and re-invented herself. The consequence of this is that, in spite of the fact that she published an autobiography, it remains difficult to reassemble the factual details of Fuller's life and career accurately. As Margaret Haile Harris has commented, 'Loïe Fuller's career is poorly documented and Loïe herself is often the most unreliable source of information. Recognizing the importance of publicity, she would, when public interest subsided, instigate a lawsuit or announce a dramatic illness.' [12] The whimsical inaccuracy of Fuller's autobiographical accounts, and the manipulation of the popular press that they involved, reveals the most characteristic evidence of Fuller's self-construction as a celebrity: through them she secured the continuing interest of the public and transformed herself into a creature of *fin-de-siècle* myth both on and off the stage. The success of this manipulation and domination of the contemporary press is clear in an article from *The Poster* from 1899, which opened with the statement that:

> The story of Loïe Fuller's *début* in New York, her wanderings among the lesser cities of the Continent, and her ultimate triumphant and unequivocal conquest of Paris are matters so generally known that it were impertinent to narrate them afresh. [13]

Fuller's adoption of this process of self-mythologisation is revealed in the opening citation chosen by Richard Current and Marcia Ewing Current for their recent biography of Fuller. Discovered amongst Fuller's personal correspondence it reads, '[d]o call me Loïe. It is so much my name'. [14] The statement discloses the complete recreation of Marie Louise Fuller as Loïe

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[12]Haile Harris, p. 15.
[13]'La Loïe Fuller and her Artistic Achievements', p. 69.
[14]Current and Current, p. 1.

Fuller, or La Loïe, to her French followers, and her construction of an entirely new professional identity around the name to the extent that, as the quote reveals, Loïe became her self. This self-fashioning is inherently associated with Fuller's refusal to maintain an offstage persona that conformed to the contemporary image of the mass-cultural celebrity discussed above. She created an alternative means of negotiating the terrain of celebrity that was rooted in a complicated, highly self-aware relationship with the *fin-de-siècle* gendered binaries of female/male, 'High'/'Low' culture and embodied/spiritual. It was only through her understanding and manipulation of contemporary ideas of celebrity that Fuller managed to achieve her 'star' status, but she implicitly promoted her work as that of a professional female performer.

As Loïe Fuller's work in the field of dance became progressively more experimental, she concluded that Paris was the only environment where her new performance style would receive a serious artistic response. The strength of *fin-de-siècle* Paris's international reputation as the capital of culture, the avant-garde and spectacle is clear in Fuller's decision, for, in her words, 'I wanted to go to a city where, as I had been told, educated people would like my dancing and would accord it a place in the realm of art'. [15] Yet, in spite of her emphasis on the artistic appeal of Paris as a performance environment, Fuller was also aware that the city's fascination with spectacle and reputation for mass culture would offer her the opportunity of financial stability and a performance career.

Performing in Paris had been Fuller's aspiration for a number of years before she reached the metropolis in 1893. She chose to live in the French capital for the

[15]Fuller, p. 46.

remainder of her life (and to be buried in the city's *Père Lachaise* cemetery), but appears to have existed almost outside of French culture. Her position as an American on the boundaries of society is demonstrated in her decision not to learn to speak French well: she seems to have been aware of, and made no attempt to hide, her expatriate identity. In this way Fuller can be seen as a precursor of the left bank expatriate community of women, including Djuna Barnes and Natalie Barney, who were to find Paris a creative environment early in the twentieth century. This modernist community has been the subject of much academic interest and in her study, *Women of the Left Bank, Paris 1900-1940*, Shari Benstock has commented that expatriate female writers, artists and performers discovered a level of artistic freedom in Paris that was a direct result of their status as foreigners: their position offered them exemption from the moral and social codes that regulated the lifestyles of French nationals. The 'immunity' that Fuller achieved from contemporary assumptions surrounding the female performer appears to have been the result of an appropriation of Urry's concept of the tourist gaze. Fuller's expatriate identity placed her in another metropolitan liminal space: as a resident of the city, who was still to some degree an 'Other'. Furthermore, it suggests another incorporation of dualistic ideas into Fuller's lifestyle and creative process.

The timing and the nature of Loïe Fuller's journey to Paris were dictated by financial constraints. In 1893 she was offered a position with an American variety company who were touring to Germany and accepted, planning on making the shorter trip to France when she had already reached Europe. The contrast between existing accounts of this journey emphasise the link between

Fuller, popular culture and celebrity. In the 1940s, Clare de Morinni recorded that Fuller:

> desired Paris, but chance offered Berlin. She took a second-class boat to Hamburg, dancing on board. [...] Eventually she reached France, even though obliged to dance her way there in a travelling circus, appearing between an elephant act and a team of jugglers. [16]

De Morinni romanticises Fuller's travel to Paris in a manner that conforms to notions of the *fin-de-siècle* 'star' in a way that Fuller herself characteristically does not. In her autobiography the dancer described the trip as follows:

> I had to dance in a circus between an educated donkey and an elephant that played the organ. My humiliation was complete. Since then, however, occasions have not been lacking when I have realised that the proximity of trained horses and music-mad elephants is less humiliating than intercourse with some human beings. [17]

When Fuller reached Paris she discovered that imitators of her dance form were already performing across the city. She was rejected by her first choice of venue, the *Opéra*, but accepted a contract at the music hall, the *Folies-Bergère*, which she was offered only after she had convinced the venue's manager that she was a superior performer to the Fuller imitator who was already resident there. The Paris premiere of Fuller's serpentine dance occurred on November 5th 1892. The opening night was hugely successful and tickets for successive performances could only be had through advance reservation. At the height of her fame Fuller performed seven nights a week at the *Folies Bergère* and at a further two weekly matinees.

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[16]Clare de Morinni, 'Loïe Fuller: The Fairy of Light', *Dance Index*, 1 (1942), 40-51 (p. 42).
[17]Fuller, p. 50.

Alongside the *Moulin Rouge*, where Jane Avril was performing nightly, the *Folies-Bergère* was one of the legendary mass-cultural spaces of *fin-de-siècle* Paris. The dance hall opened in 1869 but it was not terribly successful and closed the following year as the combined result of the siege and the commune of Paris. As the case of the *Moulin Rouge* revealed, late nineteenth-century Paris's mass-cultural industry was highly competitive and to succeed new venues needed to offer a sophisticated blend of novelty factor and an advanced marketing strategy. In 1871 the management of the *Folies-Bergère* was taken over by Léon Sari, who remodelled the venue on a design based on the Alhambra Theatre in London. [18] The Alhambra, alongside the Empire, was renowned for its *promenoir*, a space at the back of the theatre where prostitutes would stroll up and down during the performances, waiting for trade. The inclusion of the *promenoir* added something different and slightly risqué to the new incarnation of the *Folies-Bergère*, precisely what was required to attract a new audience. The success of this decision is made clear in the entry on the venue in a 1900 edition of Viscomte de Kératry's guide to Paris:

> The Folies-Bergère is the establishment best known by the stranger. To him it is the incarnation of Paris gay life, and he does not tarry long before he studies its phases. The public is very mixed, though elegant. The promenade is frequented, just as much as the auditorium, and offers as much attraction to the many as the fine ballet on the stage.' [19]

De Kératry's focus on the figure of the stranger echoes the anonymous spectatorial position represented by the *flâneur* and by extension the presence of a voyeuristic gaze within the venue. This is challenged, however, by the manifestation of the mixed audience of mass culture in the city and its associated

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[18]Information on The *Folies-Bergère* from David Price, *Cancan!*, pp. 87-90.
[19]Viscomte de Kératry, *Paris Exposition 1900: How to see Paris Alone* (1900), p. 160.

metropolitan gaze(s) and with the location of this definition within tourist information intended for an American reader. Furthermore, an investigation of the ticket pricing structure at the *Folies-Bergère*, where evening admission charges in 1893 ranged from 2f for the *promenoir*, to 25f for a box makes it is clear that the venue's clientele must have been made up of individuals from a wide range of social backgrounds for such a diverse pricing structure to be economically viable. The *Folies-Bergère* provides a contained example of the social diversity of spectatorial positions that were engendered in the arena of mass culture.

The *Folies-Bergère's promenoir* was one of the main reasons for the intrinsic link between the venue and prostitution. As Lucinda Jarrett has stated, '[t]he trade of women on display was a key factor in the critical success of the *Folies*, and while the prostitutes sold themselves in the promenades the courtesans paraded themselves on the stage'. [20] This is also implicitly suggested in de Kératry's city guide in the direct reference to the difference between the spectacle offered on the stage and the spectacle of the *promenoir.* Many of the famous courtesans of the city, who were discussed in chapter three, were employed by the *Folies-Bergère*, including Liane de Pougy, Cléo de Mérode, Émelienne d'Alençon and Caroline Otéro and the financial success of the venue during this early period of tolerated 'disrespectability' is suggested by Caroline Otéro's salary, which – during the 1870s – rose from 5,000F to 35,000F per month.

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[20]Lucinda Jarrett, *Stripping in Time:: A History of Erotic Dancing* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 36.

The guidebook entry on the *Folies-Bergère* makes it clear that the dance hall was not a morally or artistically approved venue during the second half of the nineteenth century, in spite of its popularity. However, Loïe Fuller's residency did succeed in gradually improving not only the reputation of the venue, but of music-hall entertainment in general. The air of respectability that Fuller assumed in her performance is revealed in Mrs Griffiths's article for *The Strand* magazine, cited at the opening of this chapter:

> Miss Fuller has done wonders in improving the public taste, and proving that dancing is not an art that degrades, but, with modestly -draped figure and graceful movements, an educator, as everything that is beautiful ought to be. Let us hope that the craze for high-kicking, unnatural straining of the muscles, and the hideous short skirts and scanty bodice will become a thing of the past, and that a mere display of skill and agility without the elegance and grace which ought to characterize the Terpsichorean art will die a natural death. [...] it may truly be said there is not a discordant note in her whole performance, or a gesture or movement which would wound the susceptibilities of the most modest-minded of British matrons or maidens. [21]

Griffiths's article reveals that the concerns surrounding dance as a 'degrading' form of entertainment were founded in the freneticism of the performer's movement and in the convention to design costume that emphasised the female body that was made clear by Arthur Symons's disapproval of 'Monkey Island'. Earlier in the article Griffiths does comment that Loïe Fuller's 'shapely form' is 'sometimes veiled, and at other times revealed' during her performance and that she does not wear a corset, however, the graceful nature of her performance appears to compensate for this. In addition to this, the ease with which Fuller appeared to dance, in contrast to the 'unnatural straining of the muscles' that the author perceived in the work of other female performers, indicates the emphasis that Fuller put upon making her performance appear natural and instinctive. This

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[21]Griffiths, p. 545.

is highlighted when one considers the weight of the fabric that she danced with and the many injuries she sustained as a result of her performance. The differences that Griffiths notes between Fuller's dance and that of other female performers are superficial; elements of image and performance that were constructed by Fuller in accordance with her understanding of contemporary gender constructs and celebrity.

The *Folies-Bergère* was a variety theatre, offering a diverse programme of entertainment nightly. The programme for Friday 24 March 1893, four months into Fuller's hugely successful engagement at the venue (revealed by the image of the dancer on its front cover) list a succession of acts. These included Miss Alvirez with her performing dogs; Miss Holtlim who presented a series of athletic exercises; a team of acrobats; a one-act ballet entitled '*Les Folies Parisiennes*', which was based on the nightlife of Paris, and included the famous *cancaneuse* La Goulue as a main character, and La Belle Fatma, an Algerian belly dancer who performed in the gardens during the interval for an additional charge. Loïe Fuller was the penultimate act of the second half, followed by Mr Ralph Terry and his shadow show.

Immediately a variety billing may seem incongruous with the accepted avant-garde nature of Fuller's performance, but this was familiar territory for the dancer on her arrival in Paris. In America, Fuller had joined William F. Cody's Company for a short tour in 1881. Cody (1846-1917) was better known as Buffalo Bill, and his company toured to Chicago with a 'soul-stirring, blood-curdling drama' entitled *The Prairie Waif.* While the company were in the city

the lead actress was sacked for consistent lateness and Fuller took over the lead role at short notice, with a performance that secured her a contract for the remainder of the tour. [22] However, an evening's entertainment from Cody's company did not only consist of this one melodramatic offering. It also incorporated a variety programme of entertainment styles that would have been more familiar in the circus ring than on the stage. The April 1, 1886 edition of the *Georgetown Courier* reads:

> One Night Only. [...] The Only and Original Buffalo Bill Hon. W.F. Cody, Late Chief of the Scouts of the U.S. Army, and his Mammoth Combination in his great Sensational Drama, entitled The Prairie Waif, Introducing the Western Scout and Daring Rider Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys. A Genuine Band of Pawnee Indians, Under Pawnee Billy, Boy Chief and Interpreter. 24 First Class Artists. New and Beautiful Scenery. Mr. Cody, Buffalo Bill,' will give an exhibition of fancy Rifle Shooting, holding his rifle in twenty different positions, in which he is acknowledged preeminent. [23]

In direct contrast to Fuller's attempts to exclude some of the early sections of her career from her autobiographical accounts, she never denied the importance of the popular culture industry to her success. This was particularly true of the important role that the *Folies-Bergère* played in her fame in Paris, revealed in the fact that she entitled the fifth chapter of her autobiography, 'My Appearance at the *Folies-Bergère*'. The arena of mass entertainment is central to an understanding of Fuller's achievement as a respected, experimental performer. A significant amount of the criticism surrounding Fuller has, however, failed to negotiate this terrain, instead conflating the atmosphere of the popular venues with the interpretation of Fuller's performance as 'High' art. This tension is revealed in an early article on Fuller, 'The Stage Apprenticeship of Loïe Fuller',

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[22]Anon, cited in Current and Current, p. 14.
[23]*The Georgetown Courier*, 1 April 1896, p. 12.

by Sally R. Sommer, where she states that: '[that] this new modern dance was art was not questioned, and Fuller was able to turn the somewhat sleazy *Folies Bergère* into a Temple of Art. Her success was enormous and immediate, she was quite literally an overnight sensation in Paris'. [24] The two distinct sections of this citation – popular and avant-garde culture – demonstrate the problematic theoretical situation that is created when the industry of mass culture is precluded from historical investigations of performance. In Sommer's vision of Fuller's fame, 'Temple of Art' and 'overnight sensation' come across as mutually conflicting ideas: for Fuller's dance to be accepted as experimental performance, the *Folies-Bergère* had to be transformed into a cultural shrine.

As previously established, the relationship between the avant-garde and the venues of popular culture at the *fin de siècle* was the result of a complex network of artistic ideas and responses to modernity, not the sole result of a performer whose work appeared to conform with their aesthetic principles. Fuller's dance may have attracted more artists to the *Folies-Bergère*, but a significant number of painters frequented the venues of popular culture prior to her success. While it is true that the contents of this programme from 1893 suggest that there would be little to interest the city's artistic communities, aside from Fuller's dances and, perhaps, the shadow show, artists also used the informal nature of these public spaces, and their inherent relationship with the technology and economy of the new urban sites of modernity, to explore new ways of expressing the ephemerality of the *fin de siècle.* This is evinced by the appearance of dance halls and café-concerts as a recurrent trope in late nineteenth-century art.

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[24]Sally R. Sommer, 'The Stage Apprenticeship of Loie Fuller', *Dance Index* 12 (1977), 23-34 (p. 24).

To the majority of the members of the *Folies-Bergère's* audience, however, Loïe Fuller was simply the most popular performer of the day and going to watch her dance was an urban activity prescribed by the intrinsically linked forces of contemporary mass cultural taste and marketing: *fin-de-siècle* popular trends were partially the result of the perceived single-minded crowd mentality explored in chapter three. It is undeniable that Fuller's work was viewed as the fulfilment of an aesthetic ideal by many important artistic figures in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, but simultaneously it is crucial to remember that she was, first and foremost, a popular stage performer. Fuller's performance history reveals the value of the venues of mass culture as a site for the investigation of the dynamics of and interactions between gaze(s). Neglecting the centrality of the spaces of popular culture to constructions of *fin-de-siècle* performance and aesthetics, and to later understandings of modernity, or evading the problems that mass culture raises through the assumption that Fuller transformed the *Folies-Bergère* into an 'artistic shrine', results in a misunderstanding of the impact of Fuller's style.

Fuller relied primarily upon the developing technologies of mass culture to become an, 'overnight sensation'. This is particularly clear in her employment of the modern advertising industry and in her use of the artistic output of poets, artists and sculptors to promote her work. These representations included works by George Rodenbach (1855-1898), Stéphane Mallarmé, Jean Lorrain and Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) and they have been the basis of much the retrospective validation of and interest in Fuller's performance. [25] Unlike Avril, Fuller was not reliant solely on Toulouse-Lautrec for the immortalisation of her

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[25]Frank Kermode, for example, said of Loïe Fuller: 'It is a highflown way of talking about an affected music-hall dancer with an interest in stage lighting; and we should hardly venture it without the authority of Mallarmé.' 'Poet and Dancer before Diaghilev', p. 75.

image. The only image that Lautrec produced of Fuller was the limited run of hand-finished lithographs that were discussed in chapter three, in which he attempted to capture the visual effects created by her Fire Dance. Fuller commissioned lithographs from the more mainstream and popular poster artists who were working in the city at the time. As an article in the London journal *The Poster* in 1899 stated: 'from the outset of her brilliant career, [Loïe Fuller] has been too shrewd to disdain the sweet uses of advertisement and she has remembered that artistic advertisement is of all methods of publicity the most surely effective'. [26] Fuller not only recognised the power of the poster, she also had the acumen to recognise which artists appealed most widely across the classes and genders of the people who came to see her perform, the clearest example of this being the Chéret poster that hung in her dressing room at the *Folies-Bergère.*

The complex intersections between Fuller, the avant-garde and commodity culture that were initiated by her appearances in venues of mass culture and extended by her proficient use of the modern marketing industry can be explored further through her relationship with the Art Nouveau movement. The figure of Fuller and the Art Nouveau movement were inherently connected by the questions surrounding the dualities of spiritual/embodied and 'High'/'Low' culture that shaped the construct of femininity and the figure of the female celebrity at the *fin de siècle.*

'The muse of Art Nouveau of a whole was the dancer Loïe Fuller.' [27]

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[26]La Loïe Fuller and her Artistic Advertisements', p. 74.
[27]Gabriele Fahr-Becker, *Art Nouveau* (Cologne: Könemann Verlagsgesellschaft, 1997), p. 100.

A significant amount of academic attention has been focused on the links between the visual effects of Loïe Fuller's performance and the symbolist and Art Nouveau movements within the field of art history. The close affiliation between Symbolism and Art Nouveau is due to Art Nouveau's adoption of the French Symbolist's interest in the mystical elements of human nature and in the exploration of new psychologies. The connection between Fuller and Art Nouveau is more complex than her acting as a visual representation of the form, however, they are also linked by their shared location between 'High' and 'Low' culture; the combined result of their popularity and their use of the technologies of modernity that situated them within the world of mass culture. The reasons for this close relationship are rooted in the contextual moment of the emergence of Art Nouveau and in retrospective understandings and interpretations of the movement.

Loïe Fuller has been identified as the iconic figure of Art Nouveau, both by its practitioners and in later critical responses to the movement. Indeed, until the recent growth in academic interest in Fuller as a performer, the one significant source of information about her was studies of this short-lived, but enduringly popular, decorative arts movement. Fuller's textured use of colours, fabrics and electricity to create a sequence of organic shapes on stage appealed to the Art Nouveau artists in its seeming reflection of their own aesthetic values. As one nineteenth-century account reported, ' [i]n ever bolder serpentines, she waxed into a giant ornament, whose metamorphoses of turbulent flaring up, subsiding and engulfment in darkness and curtain appeared in our memories like symbols

of Art Nouveau'. [28] Fuller's organic forms can be equated with contemporary concepts of femininity, in their focus on the soft curves of the serpentine dance. Furthermore, her performance was also affiliated to the Art Nouveau aesthetic through their interest in the spiritual and the mystic, for, as the mirror dance revealed, Fuller's performance recurrently dealt with themes of insubstantiality.

Fuller's role within the Art Nouveau movement also disrupts the traditional understanding of the figure of the muse within the process of artistic creation. The muse is characteristically associated with ideas of passivity, a woman who acts as a visual source of creativity. In the case of Fuller, artists instead drew their inspiration from the dancer's actual presence in motion, which suggests a dynamic relationship between the model and the artist. The 'Fuller-esque' images and sculptures that were produced by the Art Nouveau artists have fuelled accusations of essentialism against Loïe Fuller's performance and modern dance in general. Whether directly attributed to Fuller's work or not, what these pieces reveal is the constant repetition of a tall, lean female form swathed in scarves. Maurice Rheim's statement that, '[t]o most of those who depicted her, Loïe Fuller was a gigantic billowing skirt under whose undulation the dancer's body is engulfed and drowned', is clearly applicable to Raoul-François Larche's (1860-1912) famous, and popular, representation of Fuller moulded into the stand for a table lamp (figure seventeen). [29] Larche captures his vision of the organicism of Fuller's movement, which encompassed the Art Nouveau vision of femininity as a curvaceous and natural force. Art Nouveau images of Fuller are seductive and they do capture some idea of a sense of

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[28]Anon., cited in Fahr-Becker, p. 100.
[29]Maurice Rheims, *The Age of Art Nouveau* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966), p. 389.

movement, but it cannot be denied that they are concurrently erotic. Their enduring appeal was made clear at the 2000 exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, 'Art Nouveau 1890-1914', where Chéret's famous lithographic interpretation of Fuller's fire dance was adopted as the main merchandising motif, available for the visitor to own on anything from mugs and chocolate bars to cross-stitch kits and notelets.

Figure Seventeen: Raoul-François Larche, 'Loïe Fuller Lamp' (c1900).

The contemporary and enduring popularity of the Art Nouveau movement is intrinsically linked to the commodity culture of the *fin de siècle.* In spite of its aims to resist the industrialisation of culture that was a result of the machine age:

> given that Art Nouveau was only possible because of the material revolutions that transformed the way societies produced and consumed cultural artefacts, it might seem eccentric that many designers in the style were circumspect about the materialism that surrounded them. It was inevitable, however, that an age that was typified (at the time as well as later) as one of frenetic technical progress should also be one of occultism and mysticism. [30]

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[30]Ghislaine Wood and Paul Greenhalgh, 'Symbols of the Sacred and Profane', *Art Nouveau, 1890-1914*, p. 73.

The tensions that were evoked by this sense of an opposition to, yet necessary dependence on, the technologies of modernity and mass production reflects the dualities that shaped *fin-de-siècle* society. Significantly, in her study, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style,* Debora Silverman locates the Eiffel Tower as an early manifestation of the Art Nouveau style, stating that in 1889 the term had been used to herald 'a new world of public technology and advanced industrial production', which was realised in the design and construction of both the Eiffel Tower and the Galley of Machines for the year's *exposition universelle.* [31] This locates the Art Nouveau movement at the core of the dualistic approach to *fin-de-siècle* society outlined in the opening of this thesis. Furthermore the problematic location of Art Nouveau in the conceptual void between understandings of 'High' and 'Low' culture reflects Avril's and Fuller's ambiguous location as creative figures and popular performers; incarnations of the *danseuse.*

The integration of the modern forces of technology and production into Art Nouveau also raises the question of the gendering of aesthetic movements at the *fin de siècle.* The academic and popular focus on a restricted group of major figures who were involved in Art Nouveau design and architecture, including Lalique, Mackintosh, Tiffany and Gallé, has resulted in the idea that the movement was male-dominated. In addition to this it relied upon femininity as its central motif, conveyed through the recurrent use of pastel colours, organic shapes and the image of fecundity that is conveyed by the reliance on natural forms within the style. Even in the darker elements of the movement anxiety

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[31]Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California, 1992), pp. 1-2.

was characteristically embodied through the repeated presence of the *femme fatale*. The masculine nature of the movement has been reinforced by the works of Art Nouveau that are easily available through the mass culture of the twenty-first century, but what has been inherited is a specific incarnation of Art Nouveau and the reproductions stocked by the high street stores offer a highly sanitised version of the experimentation that was occurring in the original form. The output of the Art Nouveau artists also included much darker works that attempted to engage with and negotiate the threatening elements of modernity.

The contemporary affiliation that was perceived between Fuller and the anxieties of the *fin de siècle* – the darker elements of the experience of modernity – expressed by the Art Nouveau movement is evinced by the French critic Rastignac, in an 1893 article written for the journal, *L'Illustration.* Rastignac questioned the reasons for Loïe Fuller's popularity, drawing upon the same elements of her performance that appealed to the Symbolists and to Art Nouveau in his attempt to explain the nature of her mass appeal:

> I know well that symbolism, occultism and neocatholicism are the fashion. They distract us, at least from everyday life [...] And I explain to myself the great success of Loïe Fuller by the feeling she gives visions of the infinite [...] She is not a woman of flesh and bone and brown hair. [...] One's eyes follow Loïe Fuller who undulates and turns like a dervish, as a child follows from afar the slow flight of a dragonfly, whose iridescent wings have exactly the changing reflections of the robe of the American. [32]

The deconstruction of Fuller's performance offered forms a complex amalgamation of contemporary representations of femininity. The focus on the motifs of the natural world echoes one of the central themes of Art Nouveau artists, particularly in

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[32]M. Rastignac, 'Courrier de Paris', *L'Illustration*, January 30 1893, p. 26.

the reference to the butterfly, a core symbol in the movement's popular, mass-produced products that appeared frequently in Lalique's and Tiffany's jewellery design. The image of the butterfly also acts as a metaphorical representation of the affiliation between Fuller and Art Nouveau that Rastignac implies, through the iridescent colours and sense of movement conveyed by the animal and Fuller's dance.

Rastignac also identifies a threatening spiritual element to the performance of Loïe Fuller: 'she is not a woman of flesh and bone' suggests an unclassifiable interpretation of her embodied form on stage, a return to the images of corporeality and insubstantiality that emerged from 'The Mirror Dance' discussed earlier. Rastignac also makes a pointed reference to Fuller's nationality, labelling her as 'the American'. This is significant for it suggests the idea of 'otherness' that Fuller maintained through her well-publicised expatriate identity; for Rastignac, this element of 'foreignness' appears to have increased the mysterious aspect of her performance.

Rastignac's description of Fuller's dance suggests a level of solipsism that is comparable to accounts of Jane Avril's performance. This self-referential element was also considered to be one of the main characteristics of Art Nouveau, which:

> Distinguishe[d] itself not only through its pursuit of beauty, of beauty at almost any cost, and through its narcissistic self-admiration, but also through its exhibitionism. Before the twentieth century, no other style had, in as great a number of "exhibitions", admired itself and courted admiration. No other art had yet produced so many and such beautiful periodicals to mirror and reveal itself [...] It is no coincidence that Art Nouveau had a predilection for the peacock, the symbol of vanity [...] [33]

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[33]Schmutzler, *Art Nouveau*, (London: Thames and Hudson), p. 13.

Art Nouveau was not linked to modernity solely through its dependence on the production processes of commodity culture; it also reflected the period's active involvement with an aesthetic of spectacle and display. In France, Art Nouveau was popular across the social and artistic spectrums, from the applied arts to the quintessentially modern fields of advertising and publishing. It was the first movement that did not just reflect modernity but relied upon its developments, affiliating itself with mass culture and production. The complexity of the relationship between Art Nouveau and modernity reveals interesting links with Loïe Fuller, which can be traced through her understanding of the new mechanisms of celebrity. This interdependent relationship between dancer and style demands a renegotiation of the ways in which she has been represented as the muse of Art Nouveau.

As has been earlier established, the moment at which the 'High' culture that was associated with *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic movements and the 'Low' culture that was linked with the developing form of mass spectacle intersect is a crucial focal point in any investigation of the contribution and value of ephemeral objects or performance as examples of cultural production. In addition to the bespoke *objets* that were commissioned by wealthy clients during the brief period of Art Nouveau, the European market was saturated with affordable items that were mass-produced in accordance with a set of well-documented aesthetic principles. The commodification of Art Nouveau encapsulates the inherent link between mass culture and modernist aesthetics that can be explored by the Loïe Fuller merchandise available in *fin-de-siècle* Paris. As well as the marketing of fashion

items inspired by Fuller's performance style, the dancer's popularity resulted in stores such as the *Louvre*, *Bon Marché*, *Au Printemps* and the other major department stores stocking numerous representations of the performer in Art Nouveau inspired *objets.* These included Loïe Fuller statuettes, lamps and ashtrays, all of which encapsulated the trademark curving lines and arabesques that characterised both her performance and the artistic movement.

Fuller and the Art Nouveau movement admitted the importance of commodity culture to their sphere of expression and extended their aesthetic principles to embrace it. Fuller, for example, although insisting on the validity of her work as experimental performance in the same avant-garde vein as the symbolists whom she had such an influence on, still used the foyer of her theatre at Paris 1900 to sell small reproduction statuettes of herself, including those of the popular Pierre Roche (1855-1922) piece that surmounted her theatre at the exhibition. The entrance of Art Nouveau into the arena of mass-culture reveals that one of the main effects of the movement was the equalisation of the arts; indeed Philippe Julian suggests that this was a key element of the artists' aesthetic agendas. [34] Concurrently, however, a hierarchical cultural approach towards Art Nouveau remained. This is illustrated by Julian in his study of the 1900 exhibition site, where he notes that the term 'modern style' was adopted to refer to 'popularised' examples of Art Nouveau that were considered vulgar as a result of their mass production. An interesting juncture between the 'High' and 'Low' products of Art Nouveau is supplied in the influence of the movement's aesthetics on the *fin-de-siècle* fashion industry.

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[34]Philipe Julian, *The Triumph of Art Nouveau: Paris Exhibition 1900* (London: Phaidon, 1974), p. 111.

Investigations of Art Nouveau's influence on textiles have tended to be restricted to their use in interior design and embroidery, with the movement's impact on costume rarely being considered. [35] The fashion industry formed an integral element of the commodity culture that shaped the metropolis and was both propagated through the department stores as well as influencing their fundamental dependence on the art of display. The department stores of *fin-de-siècle* Paris were in direct competition with each other, making it an economic necessity for them to constantly respond to consumer demand. The contemporary popularity of products inspired by *fin-de-siècle* celebrities reflects the ephemeral nature of the fashion and images of modernity and supplies an interesting angle on the complexity of the late nineteenth-century female image at the *fin de siècle.* The role of female icons in the fashion industry suggests that dress was a means of cultural production that was inherently linked to mass culture and art, whilst simultaneously functioning as an arena that offered women some control over their visual image. Combined with the integration of aesthetic movements in fashion design, this suggests that, rather than dismissing the field as meaningless or as evidence of the pervasive nature of patriarchal domination, it can supply a productive area for an exploration of the study of entertainment and gender constructions.

The relative lack of scholarly interest in the influence of the Art Nouveau movement on the fashion industry can partially be explained by the lack of extant items of clothing, in comparison to the wealth of visual images and sculpture. This further reflects the 'Low' cultural status that has been accorded to fashion,

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[35]In fact, the most famous of the whiplash curves that precipitated the movement were pieces of embroidery created by Hermann Obrist in the mid 1890s.

which was not kept in the same way as paintings or ornaments, instead items of clothing tended to be discarded as new trends arrived. The key Art Nouveau artist, Henry van de Velde (1863-1957), produced numerous designs for female clothing, but all that remains are photographs of the pieces, including figure eighteen, an example of a dress from the late 1890s. The influential effects of Art Nouveau on fashion design are made clear, however, in this contemporary response to his characteristic style:

> In the dresses designed for them by de Feure, women keep the graceful outline of their figures, which are lengthened a little but remain supple. The dress, simply decorated at neck and shoulders, moulds the waist and hips; the skirt falls in straight folds, flares out with the grace of a reversed lily, and the hem is heavy with original embroidery whose design is never a repetition of what has gone before. Gold mingles with sombre gray. Startling reds enliven delicate beiges. Pearly pink stands out on dull green. And the transition from white to black passes through a hint of blue created by juxtaposing mauve and green. [36]

The photograph and this description of van de Velde's design make it clear that Art Nouveau female dress design was centred on fluidity and movement, in direct contrast to the S-bend corset that was fashionable at the time. The image reveals that the dress's shape is the result of the weight of the fabric and that the design principles were founded in ideas of movement and colour, emphasised by the inclusion of the costume's decorative panels that would only come together when the wearer moved. Both these aims, and the description, are reminiscent of the stage costumes created by Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller. It is perhaps unsurprising, given the feminine affiliation with display and Art Nouveau, that van de Velde only designed clothing for women. In a similar way to the emulation of celebrity figures, the presence of Art Nouveau design within the

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[36]Cited in Rheims, p. 378.

fashion industry seems to have offered women some level of control over their image(s).

Figure Eighteen: Dress design by Henry van de Velde (1890s)

One of the central concerns of Art Nouveau was to engage with and represent the new environment of modernity. As Samuel Bing, owner of the *L'Art Nouveau* gallery and show room in Paris, stated in 1902:

> *L'Art Nouveau,* at the time of its creation, did not aspire in any way to the honour of becoming a generic term. It was simply the name of an establishment opened as a meeting ground for all ardent young spirits anxious to show the modernity of their tendencies, and open to all lovers of art who desired to see the working of unrevealed forces of our time. [37]

The desire to express the 'unrevealed forces of our time' emphasises the location of the movement at the centre of the discursive fields of modernity and commodity culture, a position it shared with popular entertainers such as Loïe

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[37]Samuel Bing, cited in Lara-Vinca Masini, *Art Nouveau* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), p. 2.

Fuller and with the burgeoning fashion industry. This interrelationship can be further explored through the centrality of late nineteenth-century technological developments surrounding electricity to Fuller, fashion and Art Nouveau. Electricity supplies a useful metaphorical representation of their connections as all three of the areas in question employed it as a pivotal part of their aesthetics of display. Furthermore, electric lighting also reflects the discursive network that was evoked by questions surrounding femininity, fashion and commodity culture: electricity was perceived to be, and represented as, a mysterious force, inherently linked with dominant conceptions of femininity.

The Art Nouveau artists employed electricity to emphasise the arabesque forms and subtle colour scheme that characterised their visual art and sculptural works. The Larche lamp based on Fuller's performance reveals the integration of the affiliation between the organic form, light and femininity into his design, reflecting the dancer's particular relationship with the new technology and her dependence upon it to create her effects. The 1900 exhibition witnessed the peak of the Art Nouveau movement's popularity, just prior to its transition into the geometrical principles of Art Deco, and revealed the inherent link between the form and electricity. This is coupled with the rapid adoption of electricity by *fin-de-siècle* commodity culture, as a key element of its aesthetics of display, illustrated by the transition in the use of electricity on the nineteenth-century exhibition sites. As David Nye has commented,

> '[e]arly electrical displays [at the exhibitions] explained new products and early fairs featured inventors, but as technological systems improved, pedagogy and hagiography gave way to lively demonstrations of what could be done with

electricity'. [38] Paris 1900 embraced the new potential of electricity as a central element of the spectacle of the exhibition site.

> The *Exposition Universelle* of 1900 provided one of the most audacious representations of Modernism ever seen in Europe. Having seen the Union Centrale or the Pavillon Bing, many observers left the Exposition Universelle feeling bewildered and unable to determine the direction from which the new modern style had come. An anonymous critic (probably J.H. Morel-Lacordaire), writing for the well-established newspaper *Le National* in August 1900, believed that the *Exposition* was a revelation. [...] He also noted that if this new 'tendency' was to be accepted in France, it would have to modify some of its curvilinear features. [39]

As this contemporary report suggests, the aesthetic principles of Art Nouveau permeated the Paris 1900 exhibition site, revealed in art, architecture, interior design and the commodities that were on sale as souvenirs. The exhibitions had evolved into the accepted *fin-de-siècle* site for the coalescence of spectacle, science, technology and art: 'laboratories of modernization', in the words of Robert Rydell and Nancy Gwinn in their study, *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World.* [40] This location at the intersection of a diverse network of ideas made them an ideal space for the display of works of Art Nouveau, whose artists embraced this intermingling of discourses in their aesthetic principles. As their employment of electricity implies, the movement was integrally involved with the industrialised world, in the same way Fuller used the themes and technology of industrialisation to transform her body during her performances, relying on scientific developments, particularly those of electricity, to create her dance.

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[38]David E. Nye, 'Electrifying Expositions: 1880-1939', in Robert W. Rydell and Nancy Gwinn, eds., *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), p. 141.
[39]Gabriel P. Weisberg, 'The Parisian Situation: Hector Guimard and the Emergence of Art Nouveau', in Paul Greenhalgh, ed., *Art Nouveau 1890-1914* (London: V&A Publications, 2000), pp. 269-70.
[40]Robert W. Rydell and Nancy Gwinn, eds., *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), p. 1.

'A special Palace is reserved for Electricity, which may in truth be called the Queen of the Exhibition': Fuller, Electricity and Paris 1900. [41]

Paris 1900 supplies a metaphorical representation of the convergence of mass culture and technology; an encapsulation of the *fin-de-siècle* city's love of spectacle and display. The event opened on the 15th of April and closed on the 12th of November and in between those two dates an estimated forty eight million people passed through the grounds of the exhibition, thirteen million more individuals than the entire population of France. [42] The site housed 83, 000 exhibitors, around 46% of whom were French, with the remainder representing international companies and organisations. The opening section of a Parisian guidebook, *Le Guide de l'Exposition de 1900,* produced for visitors to the exhibition (and by implication also to the city) describes the metropolis as a dream city, and this idea of the illusionary and the fairy tale pervaded the site, the shaping force in the aesthetic logic behind the display. [43] The structure of information offered by *Le Guide de l'Exposition de 1900* is particularly significant, as its sections focus on the educational and scientific aspects of the exhibition, but integrate them almost imperceptibly with the metaphors of fantasy that pervaded the site. The entwined nature of science and spectacle, identified through the figures of Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller, formed the basis of Paris 1900; a public display of the disruption of dualistic ideology by the *fin de siècle.*

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[41]Anon., *Cook's Guide to Paris* (London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1900), p. xxi.
[42]Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1988), p. 37.
[43]'Vous voilà à Paris; de loin, vous avez déjà apercu, comme dans un rêve, les constructions de l'Exposition se detacher sur le ciel de la grande ville'.H. Lapauze, Max de Nansouty, A. da Cunha, H. Jarzuel, G. Vitoux, L. Guillet, *Le Guide de l'Expostion de 1900* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1900), p. 6.

This destabilisation of the binaries of nineteenth-century social constructions is partially explained by the contemporary attempt to clothe and enliven technology with art and entertainment. An idea that incorporated the changing use of electricity on the entertainment sites and is reflected in the fact that new technology provided one of the most important visual features of *Paris 1900.* In an article on the importance of the world fairs as cultural and historical events, James Gilbert concludes that their success was partly due to the way in which, '[c]ommerce funded culture, while culture reimbursed and glamorised commerce'. [44] Gilbert's comment emphasises the inseparable links between 'High' and 'Low' culture during the period. The 1900 exhibition site was organised around a pervasive sense of femininity that naturally linked with the focus on spectacle.

A brief investigation of the number of exhibits that were founded entirely on their visual appeal provides an insight into the aesthetic of spectacle that dominated Paris 1900. The design and contents of a significant number of the temporary pavilions constructed for the event centred on optical illusions, mirages and fantastic costume. One clear example of this motif is supplied by the *Palais des Mirages*, a hexagonal pavilion inspired by Moorish architecture the same new technologies as the displays at the department stores, electricity, mirrors and large sheets of plate glass, to create fantastic kaleidoscopic effects:

> The immense sheets of glass which form the walls of the room reflect an infinity of vaults, soffits and columns. [...] Suddenly, the depths are illuminated; the arches are fringed with a lace of fire; blue and

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[44]James Gilbert, 'World's Fairs as Historical Events', in Robert W. Rydell and Nancy Gwinn, eds., *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World* (Amsterdam: VU University, 1994), 13-27, 20

red stars] light up in the long avenues. [45]

The element that connected the visual stimulus provided by the majority of the exhibits, and is located at the core of the ornate descriptions that remain of them (even if the realising force is not explicitly mentioned), was electricity. The description of the *Palais des Mirages* is reminiscent of contemporary responses to Loïe Fuller's work, both in its visual effect and in its use of technology. Fuller became the main symbol of Paris 1900, replacing the organiser's attempt to encapsulate the event in the figure of the 'Parisienne'.

The main entrance gate to the 1900 exhibition, the *Porte Binet,* was designed to admit 30,000 visitors an hour. The gate was surmounted by the *Parisienne*, a fifteen-foot tall statue created by Moreau-Vautier that was intended to symbolise the themes of the exhibition (figure nineteen). According to the contemporary literary figure, Paul Morand, the *Parisienne* was, ' [a] flying figure of a siren in a tight skirt, the symbolic ship of Paris on her head, throwing back an evening coat of imitation ermine'. [46] Morand's pointed reference to the imitation ermine is important here, what Moreau-Vautier had given the exhibition's audience was a representation of one of the modern metropolis's most ambiguous figures, the female consumer. Morand's negative reaction to the *Parisienne* was echoed across the city and appears to be located in this visual link between femininity and commodity culture in the most classical of art forms, sculpture. Consequently it tapped directly into the anxieties evoked by the woman with necessary economic power discussed in chapter two and rejected the

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[45]André Hallays cited in Phillipe Julian, *The Triumph of Art Nouveau: Paris Exhibtion 1900* (London: Phaidon, 1974), p. 177.
[46]Paul Morand, cited in Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California, 1982), p. 60.

contemporary preference for mythologized representations of women that focused on the spiritual rather than the corporeal. In, 'Re-inventing Vision: The Cinema's Radical Challenge to Representation', Tom Gunning discusses a moment in a novel by Louis Ferdinand Céline where he recreates a childhood visit to the 1900 exhibition. The child's enduring memories of the event are shaped by his nightmarish response to *La Parisienne,* or the Giant Lady Customer as he refers to her, in his vision, '[s]he grows and swells […] to cosmic proportions, sweeping away his family and the other small shopkeepers of the now demodé Parisian arcades'. [47] For Céline the *Parisienne* acted as a metaphor for the rapid changes in the urban environment that were precipitated by the *fin-de-siècle* arrival of commodity culture.

Figure Nineteen: 'La Parisienne', 1900 *exposition universelle*, Paris.

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[47]Tom Gunning, 'Re-inventing Vision: The Cinema's Radical Challenge to Representation', (unpublished paper given at the Guggenheim Museum, April 2000), p. 4.

As Morand's description suggests the *Parisienne* was universally rejected as a fitting symbol of *Paris 1900.* Instead, the supposedly emblematic figure actually became an object of derision within the contemporary metropolitan mindset; with the ridicule of the statue eventually reaching such heights that there was serious debate over whether the figure should simply be removed. Although this mockery of the *Parisienne* was not solely the result of a rejection of the link between women and technology, it does raise the issue of the problems encountered by artists when they attempted to realise the affinity. The plans that were submitted in the architectural competition for the exhibition reveal a constant return to the subject of the female form as a symbol of modernity on display, reminiscent of the idea that the *Parisienne* was clothed in the new fabrics and colours made possible by the development of technology. The clearest illustration of this is contained in the details of a design proposal that concealed half of the Eiffel Tower with a statue of a woman, based on Flaubert's interpretation of the *Salomé* figure, Salammbô. This female figure was to be one hundred and fifty metres high and to rise up out of an electrically lit waterfall, which the submission claims would have been higher than Niagara, and her eyes were to be lit up by an electric projector. [48] Ridiculous as this proposal appears to a modern reader, it is possible that the general response to the figure would have been more positive, for the *Parisienne's* main fault appears to have been that she was too realistic a representation of the female consumer.

The failure of the *Parisienne* to encapsulate the spirit of Paris 1900 can be partially explained through the rise of Fuller as an alternative figurehead in the popular and cultural imagination. James Gilbert has noted that it was the blend

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[48]Julian, p. 24.

of, ' exoticism explained by "science" [that] attracted modern audiences' to the exhibitions, rather than factual reflections of the apparent superficiality of *fin-de-siècle* Parisian life. [49] Loïe Fuller embodies Gilbert's definition of popular spectacle and for many of those who attended the exhibition it was Fuller's performance that became the event's iconic image. Fuller was undoubtedly the most prominent celebrity on the exhibition site: the organising committee gave Fuller her own theatre on the *rue de Paris*, the area devoted to entertainment; a figurine of her performing was selected to surmount the *Palais de la danse* and representations of her work formed part of the display that was contained in the *Palais de l'électricité.*

Figure Twenty: The Loïe Fuller Theatre, 1900 *exposition universelle*, Paris.

Fuller's theatre was designed by the architect, Henri Sauvage, and the sculptor, Pierre Roche, with the interior decoration fashioned by Francis Jourdain (figure twenty). The building appeared to be an architectural attempt to represent Fuller's dance and to celebrate her as an individual performer, in a large-scale construction:

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[49]Gilbert, Rydell and Gwinn, p24

> The façade, of white stuff, gave the appearance of a stage curtain, and the doorway, with proscenium-arched lintel, was revealed on either side by dancing figures of Loïe, whose upraised arms swung the curtain apart. The arch of the lintel was repeated in the sweeping roof line, where, above the door, a life-sized figure of Loïe Fuller stood with arms outstretched, draperies floating, like a winged goddess crowning her temple. [50]

Sauvage's attempt to reflect Fuller's performance in his design was noted by the critic, Arsène Alexandre, in an article for the journal *Le Théâtre,* where he commented on the way that the performance space acted as an extension of her body that seemed to move with her. [51] Alexandre makes the dialectical relationship between Fuller and her performance space clear in this account, emphasising the way that Sauvage's design was intended to pay homage to the spiritual and mythical image La Loïe projected. In the characteristically dualistic nature of the *fin de siècle,* however, this artistic experiment was complemented by the inclusion of a practical small entrance foyer mentioned earlier in this chapter, which Fuller used as a showroom of sculptures and images of her dance, the majority of which were for sale. The location of her work in the space between the avant-garde and the popular permeates her celebrity through her use of the mass cultural arena to maintain economic independence and to financially support her experimentation.

Fuller's appearances at Paris 1900 also reveal a second inherent ambiguity in the response to her performance persona. It is clear that Fuller's innovative use of lighting, colour and fabric aligned with the exhibition's aim to celebrate France's technical and cultural superiority in front of an international audience. In line

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[50]Margaret Haile Harris, 'Loïe Fuller: The Myth, the Woman and the Artist, *Arts in Virginia* 20 (1979), 16-29 (p. 25).
[51]Arsène Alexandre, 'Le Théâtre de la Loïe Fuller', *Le Théâtre* (11 August 1900), 23-25 (p. 24).

with the binaries of the *fin de siècle,* however, technology and scientific progress was classified as male territory and Fuller's use of sheer gauze fabrics and the organic forms that were created by much of her dance also linked her with the sense of feminine exoticism that predominated in the colonial displays of eastern performers, particularly the popular belly dancer. This discordance can be traced through the plethora of extant contemporary representations of Loïe Fuller, both artistic and literary. The importance of dance and the female dancer to *fin-de-siècle* ideas surrounding both art and mass culture explains the prominent position that the form held at *Paris 1900.* The *danseuse* was a recurrent presence, both in the areas within the exhibition site that were devoted to the entertainment of the masses and in the motif of the fluidity of the female body that recurs throughout Art Nouveau. She appeared in the diversity of incarnations of femininity that were suggested in chapter two, revealing gendered, colonised and nationalised bodies. The institutionalised approach to dance was encapsulated in the venue that the event's organisers devoted to the form, the *Palais de la Danse,* and the entertainment on offer in this theatre provides both an interesting contrast to and an affiliation with Fuller's own experimentation. In the Viscomte de Kératry's guide to the exhibition, *Paris Exposition 1900: How to see Paris Alone,* he describes the venue as:

> [...] an elegant little theatre reproduction of the famous Bayreuth Auditorium and the stage of the whole history of the dance, living and animated, unfurls itself before your eyes. Pretty girls, garbed in dresses appropriate to periods, countries and circumstances, take turns in dancing the Gavotte and the Minuet; then you will see the Bacchanales of the Romans, the Chinese dances followed by the Nautch girls, so light and graceful conjuring up reminiscences of India and the sacred dances. [52]

[52]de Kératry, p. 28.

The Palace of the Dance appears to have been committed to the same broadly educational aims that characterised the colonial sections of the exhibition. The interest in tracing the development of dance, through a focus on the cultural origins of genres and styles and the general impression of an organised mélange of forms reflects the period's desire to understand and to classify everything it encountered. All of this was cleverly clothed, or veiled, in the standard *fin-de-siècle* emblem of entertainment: the pretty girl, an onstage version of the *chérette*. In a significant number of accounts from the exhibition, it is difficult to separate the attractiveness of the performer from the enjoyment of the dance, an idea that links back to Symons's aesthetics of ballet and the dance.

The widespread use of electricity was still a new – modern - concept in nineteenth-century Paris. The novelty of being able to light up the streets of the city had been a key element in Haussmann's urban renovation programme. It was the generally held belief amongst the bourgeoisie that lighting made the city feel safer and thus made it more marketable and more appealing to visitors. It also opened up the metropolitan environment by night and transformed it into a spectacle. In addition to this immediately apparent use of electricity in the creation of the exhibition's fairytale landscape, electricity was also used as a ideological force that symbolised the prowess of the French at the art of display and modern technology. This element is revealed in the advertising material that surrounded the event. In the 1900 special edition of *Cook's Guide to Paris*, which contained a chapter devoted to the exhibition, the description of the grounds included a section on the site at night:

> Thus, there are provided 174 arc lamps on the Champs Elysées, 12 large arc lamps and 3,716 incandescent lamps at the Monumental Gate, the Pont Alexandre III being illuminated by 508 incandescent lamps and 13 arc lamps; the Chateau d'Eau by 1,098 incandescent lamps. The two Palais des Invalides are each illuminated by 1,068 incandescent lamps, with 85 lamps in the Central Avenue and 34 in the Quin Cunx, in all 2,554 lamps. [53]

The detailed nature of this description of the technology that was involved in the lighting up of *Paris 1900* is partially a reflection of the nineteenth-century tendency to use classification as a means of understanding. It is also, however, an illustration of Paris's pride in its ability as a city to display and to exhibit itself. Furthermore, it indicates the competitive spirit that existed between the exhibitions, with each country trying to outdo the previous effort. In these terms of national pride and technology it initially appears that electricity would be understood and promoted as a scientific, clinical and therefore masculine force. At Paris 1900, this was not the case and the dialectic relationship between the contemporary enthusiasm for electricity and Loïe Fuller's use of it is central to the popularity of her work and the respect that she achieved as a female performer.

These three important elements are inherently linked to the general ethos of the 1900 exhibition; through the implication of the concept that Paris lit up was Paris for sale. As Christopher Prendergast notes, ' [t]he lights of the city are linked to the lure of the city [...] Paris as illuminated "spectacle" is Paris offered for consumption'. [54] Prendergast's choice of language implies that the continuing metaphor of Paris's mass culture as intrinsically feminine was present from the

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[53] *Cook's Guide to Paris* (London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1900), p. v.
[54] Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachussetts; Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 34.

inception of the metropolis's urban lighting scheme; the temptations of the city are represented in terms that suggest the appeal of femininity, the metropolis lures spectators in by highlighting her beauty. Paris lit up in order to be admired raises corresponding questions about the objectification of women. The Palace of Costume contained wax models of women, clothed in the latest fashions under bright electric lighting. Both of these ideas are linked to the other familiar example of the brightly lit female body, that of the performer on the popular stage revealing that the discourses that surrounded technology and femininity were both the product of, and shaped, the mass culture industry.

In addition to the use of electricity to advertise France's mastery over the technologies of modernity, it had a second and no less important role at the 1900 exhibition. The use of electricity realized the fairytale atmosphere that characterises the literary responses to Paris 1900, referred to in the first chapter of this thesis. The hallucogenic scenes of the writer Jean Lorrain regularly returned to the visual impact of the exhibition site at night, with one account exclaiming, '[o]h the magic of the night, the many-sided and changing night! The *Porte Binet* and its grotesque pylons become like a translucent enamel and assume a certain grandeur. A symbol of the times [...]'. [55] The power of electric lighting to transfigure the ugly and concerning elements of modernity on the exhibition site, exemplified in Lorrain's description of the total transfiguration of the condemned *Porte Binet*, is important here as its emphasis on the quasi-mystical power of the force further emphasises the contemporary affiliation between electricity and mythological constructs of femininity.

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[55]Lorrain cited in Julian, p. 88.

Electricity, and the specific agenda that it was used to fulfil at *Paris 1900,* act as productive metaphors for the work of Loïe Fuller. In the same way that commentators struggled to convey the fantastical appearance of the exhibition site, Fuller's performance style evoked an on-stage manifestation of a non-human form (as has been seen in The Mirror Dance) and chroniclers of her work also frequently turn to the vocabulary of hallucinogenics. Jean Lorrain said of her Lily Dance, ' how poignant, how superb, how overwhelming and frightening, like a nightmare induced by morphine or ether'. [56] This projected image of Loïe Fuller as a non-corporeal and quasi-spiritual stage presence is central to the meaning and inheritance of her work. In the same way that the organisers and the designers of the exhibition utilised electricity to both produce fairytale landscapes and to celebrate their scientific achievements in real terms, Fuller could remain unimpressive off stage, act as choreographer, electrician, scientist and designer and also be transformed – in her chosen and controlled performance space – into *la fée de l'électricité.* Much of this was a result of her apprenticeship on the popular stage.

Fuller's professional stage career began in 1877, when she was fifteen years old and joined the American 'Felix A Vincent Company' for a nine-month tour. Felix Vincent was a successful actor, director and playwright who wrote and presented spectacular productions for the popular stage. Fuller took the minor role of Zobedie in *Alladin,* a production that was marketed as a 'pantomime-spectacle'. However, it was not the experience as an actress that Fuller gained with the company that was to have the longest lasting effects on her work but the emphasis on spectacle and the associated technologies that the production

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[56]Lorrain cited in Sally Banes, *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 72.

involved. [57] Late nineteenth-century pantomime-spectacle was fully scripted, in contrast to earlier pantomime, which had developed as a popular stage solution to offer drama whilst avoiding the censorship restrictions that banned spoken theatre on the unlicensed stage. As a genre it was characterised by, and popular for, its sequence of sensational stage effects. The images presented on the stage were considered to be far more important than either the acting or any kind of convincing plot. In an article exploring this early period of Fuller's career Sally Sommer notes that in Vincent's *Alladin*: '[o]ne extravagant scene followed another in quick succession. Chariots and carpets flew through the air, mysterious grottoes opened up to reveal romantic locales, thunder and lightening crashed [...]'. [58] The ability to present this series of stage pictures, that rapidly succeeded each other, relied upon the new technologies of the modern age and in particular on the element that Fuller was to take to new levels in her artistic experimentation – electricity.

1846 had seen the invention of the arc lamp, a development that allowed electricity to replace gas in theatres and to begin experiments in the new world of special effects. In 1879, Edison invented the incandescent lamp, increasing the control that could be held over lighting. These early electric lights were difficult to use, however, requiring an electrician for each one and necessitating each coloured gel to be changed by hand: in the 1870s it still took ten minutes to darken a theatre. [59] Nonetheless, Sommer explains how the scenes were merged together to create the overall dreamlike, fantasy ambience of Vincent's *Alladin*: '

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[57]Sommer, p. 25.
[58]Sommer, p. 26.
[59]Margaret Haile Harris, *Loïe Fuller: Magician of Light* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1979), 13.

there were dissolves – fade-in and fade-outs – from one scene to the next.' [60] These sophisticated effects were achieved through lighting effects and through the use of gauzes and steam curtains to allow the stage to be veiled while the following scene took shape slowly. In the 1870s, two decades before Fuller would rise to fame with her dance, experimentations with the devices and techniques that she would develop were already occurring on the popular stage.

Six years later, in 1887, Loïe Fuller was involved in a second highly spectacular production, again based on the pantomime story of *Alladin.* The success of this piece at the Standard Theatre in New York was also primarily the result of its spectacular staging, revealed by the fact that it features as the main advertising theme for the show. A contemporary review reported that the only point of the script was to, 'join in an intelligible manner the apparently endless series of transformation scenes, *actes de ballet*, songs, dances and speciality performances which follow close upon another with bewildering variety throughout the whole evening'. [61] This reveals another return to the combination of the advanced use of technology and the variety stage environment that was to shape Fuller's performance career. Furthermore, in October 1889 Fuller had toured a self-financed production of the play, *Caprice,* to the Globe in London, but it was unsuccessful and closed after a short run. Fuller, however, decided to stay in the city and after appearing in small roles at many of the city's popular venues, including the Globe, the Avenue, Terry's, the Opéra-Comique, Drury Lane and the Shaftesbury, she took an extended contract with the famous Gaiety Theatre. The *fin-de-siècle* Gaiety Theatre was renowned for its company of beautiful

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[60]Ibid, 26.
[61]cited in Sally Sommer, 'The Stage Apprenticeship of Loïe Fuller', p. 28.

female performers, the Gaiety Girls, and for its programme of spectacular burlesques. Fuller's experience of mass culture in America and London demonstrate the similarities between the popular stages in the metropolises of modernity and emphasises the idea of the extensive international cultural similarities and exchanges that existed by the 1890s.

The perceived affinity between women and technology is epitomised in the link between femininity and electricity. The concept of female sexuality as something slightly threatening because it is unknowable and indefinable, the same fear that is encapsulated by the thrill of the morgue, was transposed onto this new energy form. In an article on the developing use of electricity at the world fairs David Nye draws attention to the difference between the older forms of energy production, in particular that of the steam engine, where the process could be watched and understood, and the harnessing of a latent form of energy within the atmosphere and its transformation into a usable energy source, a technology that few people actually understood. [62] The amorphous power of electricity can be aligned to the abstract forces that women had traditionally been chosen to represent, for example the encapsulation of ideas of justice and freedom in the figure of Marianne. It draws on ideas of the relationship between the mythical and the feminine and thus provokes the same complicated set of discourses concerning the two extremes of femininity.

This idea of an affiliation between women, technology and mythology is reflected in a poem, by Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894), 'The Broomstick Train, or The Return of the Witches', that was published in an 1890 edition of

[62]David Nye in Rydell and Gwinn, pp141-2

The Atlantic Magazine. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes was an academic, a medical doctor and one of the six founders of *The Atlantic Magazine*, alongside figures who included Emerson and Longfellow. He was also the inventor of the stereoscope, a popular toy that turned a one-dimensional image on a postcard-sized piece of cardboard into a three-dimensional scene, through the use of a revolutionary system of lenses. Interestingly, this located Holmes at the centre of the sphere of visual culture. *The Atlantic Magazine* appears to have been relatively progressive; during the late nineteenth century approximately fifty percent of the features printed were written by women. The editorial team favoured realistic fiction, due to its popularity with the contemporary readership, for the journal was also a product of the mass culture industry and as such must be placed in its historical context to be understood.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'The Broomstick Train, or The Return of the Witches'

They came, of course, at their master's call,
The witches, the broomsticks, the cats and all;
He led the hags to a railway train
The horses were trying to drag in vain.
'Now, then,' says he, 'you've had your fun.
And here are the cars you've got to run.
The driver may just unhitch his team.
We don't want horses, we don't want steam;
You may keep your old black cats to hug.
But the loaded train you've got to lug.'
Since then on many a car you'll see
A broomstick plain as plain can be;
On every stick there's a witch astride –
The string you see to her leg is tied.
She will do a mischief if she can,
But the string is held by a careful man,
And whenever the evil-minded witch
Would cut some caper, he gives a twitch.
As for the hag, you can't see her.
But hark! You can hear the black cat's purr,
And now and then, as a car goes by,
You may catch a gleam from her wicked eye.
Often you've looked on a rushing train,
But just what moved it was not so plain.
It couldn't be those wires above.
For they could neither pull nor shove;

> Where was the motor that made it go?
> You couldn't guess. BUT NOW YOU KNOW.

Holmes's poem draws upon the link in the popular consciousness between electricity and femininity and locates it as a significant theme of the mass culture industry. Conversely, however, it identifies the manner in which Fuller's use of electricity transgressed these contemporary ideas. The illustrations of the exhibition site and Holmes's poem have established that the association between women and new the forces of modernity revolved around either spectacle and the display of the female form, or the exploitation of women in the name of humanity and technology. Fuller's experimental and controlled use of electricity negated these two connections, her role as the both the artistic and technical creator of her work complicated established ideas surrounding women, science and progress.

Fuller used the gender-based ideas that had emerged around electricity to popularise her work, but they were mixed with the knowledge that she was a scientific experimenter in her own right. The difference in the way that Fuller achieved this can be explored through the work of one of her most famous imitators, Marie Leyton, who was a regular performer at the Tivoli music hall in London. Leyton incorporated electricity into her routine in a markedly different way to Fuller. Rather than using a carefully planned and technologically advanced lighting plot, Leyton had hundreds of tiny electric light bulbs sewn onto her costume. As she moved the bulbs were illuminated so that the fabric and, by extension, the form of her body was emphasised. The different approaches to corporeality and creativity followed by female performers are clear

here and they accentuate Fuller's advanced use of electricity to question the boundaries of the popular stage.

Loïe Fuller's careful appropriation of elements of the dualities that existed behind *fin-de-siècle* ideas surrounding celebrity – the differentiation between 'High' and 'Low' cultural forms and the 'masculine' rationality of science as opposed to the 'feminine' irrationality of passion - was achieved through the potential for selectivity and objectivity that was contained within the new set of gazes offered by the modern metropolis. Fuller's performance reveals the ways in which the diversity of these new ways of looking helped to liberate the venues of popular culture as potentially experimental spaces for the female performer. By performing on the music-hall stage, Fuller gained not only the freedom to experiment with lighting and colour, she could also choreograph her own pieces and thus reject the roles that were normally given to the female dancer. In this context the lack of narrative in Fuller's dances is important. Rather than simply rejecting the male-constructed narratives of ballet and replacing them with alternative stories, Fuller rejects a narrative framework altogether. Indeed the majority of her dances are not even intended to represent the female form – instead she is a creature, for example a butterfly, a natural form, as exemplified in the lily dance, or an element, as in the fire dance. The female body of the dancer is present on stage but never simply as an object to be gazed at. 'The Mirror Dance', discussed at the opening of this chapter, reveals how early in her career she was interested in developing ways of exploiting the contemporary concepts of the gaze and of the female body as spectacle.

Fuller's most explicit challenge to contemporary ideas through performance was

encapsulated in her repeated attempt to portray the character of Salomé. The biblical dancer who demanded the head of John the Baptist resonated with gendered symbolism at the *fin de siècle.* Like Avril and Fuller, Salomé was also located at the crux of 'High' and 'Low' culture: she acted as an avant-garde representation of the *femme-fatale* whose image recurs throughout the work of artistic movements and as a familiar figure adopted by popular stage dancers. The manner in which Fuller appropriated the tale of Salomé supplies a fascinating insight into her resistance to contemporary gender ideology. The presence of dancing women in the bible had been of interest to Fuller prior to her decision to offer her own interpretation of Salomé, for she partially attributed the creative force that she expressed in her performance to the dances recorded in the bible. She makes explicit reference, in particular, to descriptions of the dancing of Miriam contained in the Old Testament:

> I have only revived a forgotten art, for I have been able to trace some of my dances back to four thousand years ago: to the time when Miriam and the women of Israel – filled with religious fervour and rapture – celebrated their release from Egyptian captivity with 'timbrels and with dances'. [63]

Salomé offered a traditional biblical figure that had been mythologised and integrated into the fabric of *fin-de-siècle* culture. Fuller was aware of manner in which Herodias's daughter had already been adopted and transfigured by contemporary anxieties, commenting in an 1896 interview that, '[t]he subject, inspite of its antiquity, is a most fascinating novelty'. [64] The late nineteenth-century incarnations of Salomé were central to Fuller's interpretation of the role,

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[63]Loïe Fuller, cited in Mrs M Griffith, 'Loïe Fuller – The Inventor of the Serpentine Dance', *Strand Magazine* (May 1894), 540.
[64]Anon., 'An Interview with Loïe Fuller', *Black and White* (January 25 1896), 118-20 (p. 118).

the biblical figure had become a contemporary mythic vessel of femininity and she simply adopted it to express her own creative agenda.

By the early twentieth century the biblical origins of the tale of Salomé sufficed to protect female dancers who performed the role from accusations of immorality or pornography. The popularity of the biblical figure blurred the boundaries between 'high' art and the new world of popular culture, 'Salomé was the symbol of the new woman; she was strong, assertive and also destructive. "Salomania" travelled quickly across the United States'. [65] As Rhonda K. Garelick has commented, 'Salomania touched virtually every aspect of popular and 'High' culture, from Symbolist verse to theatrical parodies, from night club reviews to department store fashions for women'. [66] 'Salomania' supplies an inherent link between representations of Loïe Fuller and the archaic biblical princess; both women were interpreted by the approved aesthetic and avant-garde communities, adopted by the entrepreneurs of the new commodity culture and emulated by the women of the city. Salomé too is located at the problematic intersection of the dualities of modern life.

Salomé's recurrent presence as a motif in the literature and art of the *fin de siècle* establishes her as a key element in contemporary sexual ideology. Elaine Showalter presents Salomé as 'an obsessive icon of female sexuality' in her study, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin-de-siècle*, disclosing her link with the *femme fatale*. Certainly for writers and artists including Mallarmé, Flaubert, Moreau and Huysmans, Salomé was inherently linked with the

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[65]Lucinda Jarrett, *Stripping in Time: A History of Erotic Dancing* (London; San Francisco: Pandora, 1997), pp. 82-3.
[66]Rhonda K. Garelick, 'Electric Salomé: Loïe Fuller at the Exposition Universelle of 1900', in *Imperialism and Theatre*, ed., by Ellen J. Gainor (London: Routledge, 1995), 264-98 (p. 285).

contemporary fear of powerful female sexuality and the destabilisation of gender roles through women's increasing demands for social and political agency. Through her link with the *femme fatale,* the figure of Salomé necessarily engages with the complex ideological matrix surrounding femininity discussed in chapter two.

Frankfort Sommerville published the authoritative *The Spirit of Paris*, a guide to the city and a testament to its role as the tourist and entertainment capital of Europe. Sommerville dedicates chapter eleven, entitled 'The Artists', to a discussion (which takes the form of a gentle pastiche of Baudelaire's 'Painter of Modern Life' in its structure) of his friend, M.B., who, 'has had but one aim in life, and that is to realise on canvas his ideal of Salomé. He first painted a picture of the most famous dancing girl in history in 1897, and in all these years Salomé has possessed his soul, and he cannot cease painting her until he reaches his ideal'. [67] The chapter describes the various visions of the archetypal *femme fatale* that the artist has produced over the previous fifteen years, humorously recounting the anecdote of the government approaching M.B. to buy more pieces of his work, but explaining that the state art collection cannot hold any more Salomés. Somerville's description supplies two interesting strands that illuminate Fuller's repeated use of this problematic figure.

As noted earlier, the *femme fatale*, the embodiment of dangerous organic sexuality, was shared by the Symbolist and Art Nouveau movements as their central vision of femininity. In contemporary interpretations of Salomé the two

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[67]Frankfort Sommerville, *The Spirit of Paris* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913), pp. 106-7.

forces – sexuality and organicism as an essential femininity - are intertwined. As Sommerville describes:

> And wonderfully beautiful are most of his Salomés – beautiful with fiendish, haunting beauty, sometimes languorous and sensual, sometimes devilish and cruel and vindictive. But M.B. is a painter with a startling sense of realism allied to subtle and weird imagination. The flowers are the *fleurs du mal*: there are great scarlet passion flowers, that glower like a crime; purple blooms that hang heavy with lust; huge moon-flowers like visions of evil; flowers that are dark with a king's hatred [...] [68]

The flowers that Sommerville describes are reminiscent of the work of Alphonse Mucha, who repeatedly produced images of women emerging from flowers where it is unclear where the plant ends and the female body begins. The subtle and weird imagination that Sommerville draws attention to appears to be close to the world of the symbolists. The blooms are loaded with symbolic colour, scent and meaning.

> 'The other evening I had, as it were, a vision of the theatre of the future, something of the nature of a feministic theatre.' [69]

Jules Clarétie's celebratory response to Loïe Fuller's 1907 production of Salomé was echoed by the feminist journal, *Femina,* which welcomed a new interpretation of the figure who had become an iconic representation of the *fin-de-siècle* through the imagery of the *femme fatale.*

1907, however, was not the first occasion on which Fuller had played Salomé. In 1895, she made an artistic decision that proved deeply unpopular with many critics who had previously admired her work. The origin of the idea came from

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[68]Sommerville, p. 107.
[69]Jules Clarétie, cited in Fuller, p. 282.

the author, Armand Silvestre, who specialised in music-hall librettos for the *Folies-Bergère.* Silvestre had commented that Fuller's dances evoked visions of Salomé dancing for Herod. Fuller was taken with the idea and asked him, in collaboration with Charles H Meltzer, an American newspaperman, to create a 'pantomimic dance-play, Salomé' for her. [70] She commissioned the popular composer Gabriel Pierné to compose the score. This, 'lyric pantomime in one act and five scenes' ran at the *Comédie Parisienne* from March 4 to April 27 1895 and was intended to portray Fuller as an actress as well as a dancer. [71]

The tale of Salomé signalled a significant artistic shift for Fuller, for although she had frequently appeared as an actress she had never previously used a narrative to structure her dance. In addition to a speaking role for Fuller, the piece also contained other actors; uncharacteristically the dancer would not be the sole performing presence shaping and dominating the stage space. Associated with this was Fuller's decision to discard her standard black box set for the piece, instead she selected a panorama of the city of Jerusalem as the backdrop to the play. The *Comédie Parisienne* was far smaller than the *Folies-Bergère*, where Fuller had been performing previously and this difference in the dynamics of the space and the spectatorial division between audience and performer made it significantly more difficult for the dancer to affect her self-transformation on the stage. This may explain Jean Lorrain's negative response to the piece where he described Fuller as, 'heavy, ungraceful, sweating, her makeup running, at the end of ten minutes of little exercises'. [72] Lorrain's reaction is frequently cited as an example of the generalised Parisian response to Fuller's Salomé, but it is

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[70] *Black and White*, p. 118.
[71] Cited in Current and Current, p. 81.
[72] Cited in Current and Current, p. 83.

important to note that the comment was actually a diary entry and was not published and that the show in general was not negatively received. It was not Fuller's representation of Salomé that became popular, however, rather the five dances that it included. The play ran for eight weeks but on occasions the framework of the Salomé pantomime was completely cut out and Fuller simply performed the five dances in succession.

Fuller's second interpretation of the myth of Salomé in 1907 was partially shaped in response to an increasing number of artistic, musical and theatrical visions of the figure. There was one important figure in the world of dance as well, until the disbandment of the company in 1906 Fuller's dance troupe had contained a young Canadian performer, Maud Allan. Allan had gone on to become the most famous music-hall Salomé dancer, premiering her work in Vienna in December 1906. She performed semi-nude, her costume consisting of thinly layered veils and strategically placed gemstones, echoing Tracy Davis's argument about the fragmentation of the female form through popular stage costume. Allan's performance style clearly integrated the contemporary iconography of the *femme fatale* through the exoticism and sexuality of her costume, but it also incorporated the notion of contained eroticism that characterised the movement of the sexually transgressive and dangerous woman. This is recorded in the response of an English reviewer to Allan's 1908 performance at The Palace Theatre of Varieties in London (a venue where Fuller had frequently appeared in her visits to the city in the 1890s), where he recorded that: 'London has never

seen such graceful and artistic dancing. It is of a magical beauty, but the beauty is baleful and insidious'. [73]

In Paris, Allan performed at the *Théâtre des Variétés*, a variety theatre that did not have a reputation for artistic value. She was hugely successful. Salomé defined Allan's career, but she was constantly frustrated that she was not formally recognised as an artist. Her repertoire contained other, more serious and experimental works which received very little attention, either from the press or the public. These included a dance to Chopin's Funeral March where she portrayed a woman searching for the body of her dead lover on a battlefield and a piece to Sibelius' *Valse Triste* where she represented an old woman, delirious on her death bed, whose last moments were spent dancing with the ghostly figures of her youth. Like Fuller, Allan had no training as a dancer, but her overt and sustained use of the erotic as a device to promote her work denied her the serious aesthetic consideration that she desired: she remained too closely affiliated to conventional representations of the female music-hall performer to gain aesthetic validation.

In the 1907 version Salome Fuller approached the myth far more controversially, engaging with the symbolisation of the female dancer as exotic, corporeal and dangerous and inverting it. She altered Salomé's motivation to dance, from the desire to possess the head of John the Baptist to the aim of saving his life. In Fuller's version when Salomé's dance fails to prevent her stepfather beheading the prophet and she is shown John's head she collapses and falls into a coma.

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[73]Jarrett, p. 87.

The figure of Salomé is transmuted and becomes the representation of a saving and positive force: the virgin rather than the whore.

There is a second reading, however, that is founded in Fuller's understanding of performance. In the reinterpretation of the Salomé myth she reveals how dance on the popular stage offered an opportunity for the female performer to engage with and modify contemporary female archetypes. This is supported by Jules Clarétie's conviction that, 'I can well believe that Loïe Fuller's Salomé is destined to add a Salomé unforeseen of all the Salomés that we have been privileged to see'. [74]

Fuller chose the *Théâtre des Arts* for this second performance of Salomé and the opening night saw the venue filled with the artistic and literary communities of the city. This decision seems self-conscious, as if she recognised that this work demanded a different kind of audience. For this second interpretation of the role Fuller used more costume than in 1895, but still discarded many of her silks and became a more corporeal presence on the stage.

Fuller, however, seems to have understood Salomé to be the culmination of her work. Interestingly, she chose to conclude her autobiography with Clarétie's account of her final rehearsal of the 1907 production, conveying the idea that some level of closure was achieved through this praise of the piece. Furthermore, this is a description of the dancer very much in the present moment of performance, without costume and without make up: 'It was Salomé dancing,

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[74]Clarétie, cited in Fuller, p. 288.

but a Salomé in a short skirt, a Salomé with a jacket over her shoulders, a Salomé in a tailor-made dress'. [75]

Showalter also comments on negative contemporary responses to women who interpreted the figure of Salomé on stage and on the tendency to conflate the performer with the *femme fatale*. She suggests that, '[a]lthough Salomé is an important figure on the history of dance, women who have performed the part have also had a difficult time, finding themselves conflated with Salomé in the public mind and condemned for lasciviousness and perversity'. [76] Allan's inability to gain acceptance as a serious performer may be partially linked to this. In these terms Fuller's decision to rework the tale becomes more interesting and complicated, raising specific questions related to the sexuality and availability of the female celebrity rather than the more general issues of the femme fatale and femininity. Her position as a respected performer and aesthetic figure can only have helped her interpretation of the role here. Unlike Allan – and other performers in the general trend that Showalter has identified – Fuller was not conflated with Salomé: she remained La Loïe, dancing Salomé.

It would have been simple for Fuller to recreate Salomé in a fashion that concurred with ideas surrounding the biblical princess at the *fin de siècle* through her characteristic use of veils and organic forms. Indeed it is easy to conclude that the use of motifs of organicism and exoticism to create and to embody the idea of an essential and threatening sexuality encapsulated in Salomé that this would have involved would have increased the popularity of the work. In 'The

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[75]Clarétie, cited in Fuller, p. 287.
[76]Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin-de-Siècle* (London: Virago, 1992), p. 159.

Lily Dance' and 'The Fire Dance', Fuller seems to have drawn on this imagery and, in contrast to her vision of Salomé, Jean Lorrain celebrated and immortalised these works in his prose. In them Fuller seems to have come close to his personal understanding of the incarnation of dangerous, yet seductive, sexuality in the *femme fatale*:

> Loïe Fuller does not burn; she oozes brightness, she is flame itself. Standing in a fire of coals, she smiles and her smile is like a grinning mask under the red veil in which she wraps herself, the veil which she waves and causes to ripple like the smoke of a fire over her lava-like nudity [...] this motionless and yet smiling nakedness among the coals and the fire of heaven and hell for a veil. I have already talked elsewhere of the morbid voluptuousness of the Dance of the Lily [...] In a sea of shadows a grey, indistinct form floats like a phantom and then, suddenly, under a beam of light, a spectral whiteness, a terrifying apparition. Is this a dead woman who has been crucified, hovering above a charnel-house, her arms still held out under the folds of her shroud, some huge, pale bird of the polar seas [...] how poignant, how superb, how overwhelming and frightening, like a nightmare induced by morphine or ether. [77]

Fuller's radical decision to reject the accepted vision of Salomé through the eradication of the visual associations between her performance style and the dance of the seven veils acts as a representation of the evolution of her ideas surrounding gender and performance. Rather than present a conventional incarnation of Salomé, Fuller offered a definite female, corporeal presence on stage and thus drew attention to the embodied humanity of Salomé, deconstructing the image of the *femme-fatale* as the untenable melange of sexuality in a spiritual, disembodied form. Salomé became the point at which Fuller's creative agenda, personal aesthetics and celebrity status intersected.

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[77]Lorrain, cited in Julian, pp. 89-90.

Fuller's success as a celebrity was secured by her unique combination of experimental performance on the popular stage, publicised by the technologies of mass culture. This position, between the binary oppositions of 'High' and 'Low' culture simultaneously engendered and complicated her role as a performer in late nineteenth-century Paris. Fuller's performance and celebrity identity were located at the centre of the discursive network(s) that encompassed desire, commodification, femininity and art in the *fin de siècle* metropolis. As a result of this, Loïe Fuller raises interesting questions concerning the tensions and relationships that modernity evoked between 'High' art and mass culture. The complexity of the relationship between Fuller the artist and Fuller the celebrity provides an insight into the system of dualities that shaped *fin-de-siècle* culture and the popular stage and reveals how experimental female performers used the liminal spaces in between the binaries of modernity to produce avant-garde work on the stages of mass culture.

Conclusion

In an article discussing the cultural status of dance on the late nineteenth-century music-hall stage, 'Moving Violations: Dance in the London Music Hall, 1890-1910', Amy Koritz concluded that dance at the *fin de siècle* was, 'seldom an autonomous art form'; rather that female dancers acted as a representation of femininity and not of individuality.[1] This thesis has focused on the complex ideological network that surrounded the active, female performing body at the *fin de siècle,* identifying it as the site of a significant number of the late nineteenth-century debates engendered by the anxieties about the new roles modernity offered women. The disruption of dualistic constructs of gender that resulted from the work of the experimental female dancer on the popular stage established her as an autonomous performer, a transition that is symbolised in the contrast between the iconographies of the female celebrity adopted by Jules Chéret and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. This manifestation of avant-garde aesthetics on the stages of mass culture demands a renegotiation of theoretical approaches to the early modernist period of performance history.

The world of mass culture disrupted both the use of the female body as the central metaphorical representation of *fin-de-siècle* anxieties and the social construction of femininity within the set of dualistic discursive practices that shaped the period. The emergence of a generalised society of spectacle in late nineteenth-century Paris, a transition that encompassed the evolution of a new set of modern metropolitan gazes and the entry of the woman into the public sphere, with an active role as a consumer

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[1]Amy Koritz, 'Moving Violations: Dance in the London Music Hall, 1890-1910', *Theatre Journal,* 42 (1990), 419-31(p. 420).

complicated the opposition of voyeur/object, demanded a complete change in the social ideology and interactions that had previously shaped the public spaces of the city.

The female performer's necessary and explicit presence in the public sphere located her as an ideal figure to question the dualistic system of thought that had developed from the primary opposition of masculine/feminine: 'High'/'Low' culture; Voyeur / Object; Active / Passive; Rational / Irrational and Spiritual / Embodied. The work of female performers and their role as mass-cultural celebrities existed in the undefined spaces between the established binaries of the *fin de siècle.* It is the complexity of the network of representations that surrounded the female celebrity and the conflicts that these images reveal, that suggests the ways that the *fin-de-siècle* female popular stage performer complicated and disrupted the seemingly simple incarnation of femininity that she was supposed to represent.

It is undeniable that examples of female experimental performance in *fin de siècle* Paris occurred in a less diverse range of spaces than those of its male bohemian communities. The dismissal of the creative work of popular dancers has, however, been primarily the result of unquestioned hierarchical approaches to cultural environments and the resulting negation of the celebrity figures of the mass cultural stage from considerations of avant-garde performance during the period. The process of renegotiating established attitudes towards the late nineteenth-century popular stage is endorsed by the critical concession that the period offers an unprecedented, anomalous growth in mass culture and thus demands to be treated individually. An understanding of the popular stage as a liberating

site for the female performer significantly subverts many of the problematic questions of corporeality and eroticism that the inherent feminisation of the mass-cultural sphere has intensified, allowing an interpretation of the environment as a creative space for the female performer and initiating the process of re-writing the female performer into experimental performance histories of the period, from which she has been largely excluded.

The performances of Jane Avril and Loïe Fuller challenged the representational boundaries that had shaped attitudes towards dance in the period. They relocated the audience's focus on the active female body, for in the case of both dancers, the visual effects of their work stopped when their bodies ceased to move. Jane Avril's appropriation of the discourses that associated femininity with insanity and eroticism, the result of her experiences at *Salpetrière* hospital and the *Moulin Rouge*, places her dance as a creative force that simultaneously rejected and questioned contemporary attempts to identify and control contemporary society through gender ideology. Her affiliation with *fin-de-siècle* Paris's avant-garde communities emphasises the experimental nature of her work and represented a significant transition in understandings of the female celebrity. It was in the creative and technological innovations of Loïe Fuller, however, that the accepted social construction of the popular stage performer was entirely disrupted.

'The Serpentine Dancer', by William H. Bradley (1868-1962) (1894), is generally accepted to be a representation of Loïe Fuller (figure twenty-one). Bradley's lithographic works are credited with introducing the Art Nouveau aesthetic to America and the

similarities between his style and the examples of the movement considered earlier in this thesis illustrate their aesthetic connection. 'The Serpentine Dancer' was published in *The Chap Book*, an Anglo-American periodical based in Chicago that was produced from 1894-1898. [2] During the four-years of its existence *The Chap Book* publishes critical articles and short fiction by figures including Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, W. B. Yeats and Henry James. The history of *The Chap Book* supplies a strong example of the cultural exchanges of modernity and the complex relationship between the commodification industries of mass culture and the avant-garde. The journal was established as a means of promoting the products of a small publishing house and carried advertisements, generally in lithographic form, such as those of Lautrec and Chéret. Simultaneously its editorial board recognised these images as works of art and printed a significant number of similar lithographs that did not have a marketing agenda, a policy that reflects the convergence of aesthetics and commodity cultured that characterised the artistic climate of the *fin de siècle.*

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[2]'Chap Book' is a definition that can be traced back to the earliest days of printing, in the sixteenth century. They were pamphlets that contained folk stories, remedies and popular literature.

Figure twenty-one: William H. Bradley, 'The Serpentine Dancer' (1894).

Loïe Fuller's work challenged both the representational boundaries that had previously defined the female performer and the social division of society into masculine and feminine mental, emotional and geographical spaces. Bradley's representation of her in 1894 reveals the reduction of the representation of her onstage body to pure movement, it is a visual acknowledgement that, while Fuller's embodiment and physicality were responsible for the creation of her dance, her performance was completely removed from the passive eroticised vision of female celebrity. Through this negation of the still, sexualised female body as the visual focus of dance and the development of her own artistic agenda, which eventually led to an aesthetic of abstraction, Fuller renegotiated

both the avant-garde conception of *danseuse* and the mass-cultural incarnation of celebrity at the *fin de siècle*. This is further revealed in the manner in which she self-consciously distanced herself from contemporary critical and theoretical approaches to dance through the identification of her performance as, 'dance for want of a more appropriate title', stating that, 'there ought to be a word better adapted to the thing'. [3] Furthermore, in a cultural climate where, as Koritz has identified, dance was generally understood to be a way to fill gaps in performances or to offer visions of femininity, Fuller provocatively insisted on her work being theatrical, explaining, '[a]t one time I thought of being a singer, but I am so devoted to the stage that I prefer to go on with theatrical work'. [4] This self-conscious definite distinction between the perceived artistic value inherent in dance and in song illustrates Fuller's attempt to renegotiate the aesthetic environment in which her performance occurred and her conviction that onstage female corporeality offered autonomous, creative agency.

The dualities that have framed this thesis revealed an overly simplistic, and thus unsustainable, attempt to render the threat of *fin-de-siècle* metropolitan life more ideologically secure. The liminal spaces that existed between these binaries offered a degree of resistance against contemporary social and aesthetic ideas that surrounded the relationship between gender and performance. The contemporary interest in hypnosis, and images of the circle and the mirror, that have recurred in this project reflect this notion of a set of 'alternative' spaces, constructed out of the unstable social and urban, abstract and physical, elements of the city of modernity. They indicate the element of the

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[3]Loie Fuller, *Fifteen Years of a Dancers Life* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1913), p. 70.
[4]'A Chat with Miss Loïe Fuller', *The Sketch*, April 12 1893, P. 642.

uncontrollable that formed one of thenmain sources of the anxieties of the *fin de siècle.* The urban space of mass culture was one such site, offered by the dark side of modernity that Berman has identified as that which, 'threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are'. [5] Jane Avril's and Loïe Fuller's adoption of the popular stage supplied a space in which they could create and present work that challenged the boundaries of the acknowledged sub-culture(s) of the *avant garde*; the arena of mass culture offered the female performer a moment of creative and political agency.

As this thesis has revealed, Avril's and Fuller's appropriation of the dualistic constructions of the *fin-de-siècle* ideology was at the core of their experimental performance. It seems appropriate, therefore, to conclude with Fuller's own definition of how inherent the contemporary metaphors of dualism were to her dance and aesthetics:

> "There are two Loïe Fullers", she used to say, "that dancing seraph I have created, and me." [6]

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[5]Marshall Bermann, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 15
[6]Unidentified obituary, press clipping, Theatre Museum archive, London.

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